

PREPARING FOR THE NEW TRANSLATION

AN INTRODUCTION



Beginning the first Sunday in Advent 2011, the Roman Catholic Church in the United States and in all other English speaking lands will begin using a new translation of the text of the Mass.

Between now and then we have much time to acquaint ourselves with the new texts, delve deeper into theological meaning behind some of the changes in the English texts, and foster a deeper devotion and understanding of the Eucharistic liturgy.

WHY NOW?

The texts that we currently use are primarily those published by ICEL (International Committee for English in the Liturgy) in 1973 that corresponded to the first typical (official) edition of the *Novus Ordo* of the *Roman Missal* published in Latin in 1969/70 with a few slight changes that came about in the intervening period. [The *Roman Missal* is the liturgical book containing all of the prayers for the Mass as well as the instructions or *rubrics* for what the priest is supposed to do.] The *Roman Missal, Third Edition* was promulgated by Pope John Paul II in the year 2000. It added the prayers for recently canonized saints, some new Masses for various needs and intentions, and as well as some additional prefaces. In additions some adjustments were made to the *General Instruction of the Roman Missal (GIRM)*, which you may remember being instituted six or seven years ago. During Advent 2011 we will be implementing the approved English translation of the current *Roman Missal*.

A RENEWED APPROACH

In 2001 Pope John Paul II also called for a renewed approach to the translation of texts into local languages, such as English, that would capture more faithfully the approved Latin text and thereby improve the capacity of the faithful to participate in the Liturgy. The new translations were to preserve the Latin texts, “dignity, beauty, and doctrinal precision” (*Liturgiam Authenticam* 25). Likewise the new approach to translations was to cultivate the use of a more sacred vocabulary and avoid the creation of independent instructions, prayers, and unilateral editing by the translating committee (ICEL).

Between the 1970s and 2000 a philosophy of *dynamic equivalence* had been employed that attempted to give the meaning of the overall meaning of the text without necessarily giving

a word-for-word translation of the original. For instance, many languages have colloquial expressions that do not translate easily into another language. In Spanish, there is an expression that translated literally would say “Every death of an archbishop.” In English, this *literal translation* doesn’t carry much meaning, but a *dynamically equivalent* translation “Every blue moon” conveys the Spanish expression faithfully. The former approach to translation also demonstrated a preference for less elevated language and more contemporary vocabulary. Contemporary language is forever changing, and some have argued that this has helped foster an attitude that the texts may be changed by the priest, the community, or some local committee, which is certainly not the case.

Translations should be characterized by a kind of language which is easily understandable, yet which at the same time preserves these texts’ dignity, beauty, and doctrinal precision.

LITURGIAM AUTHENTICAM, 25

While a *dynamically equivalent* translation is necessary at times, most of the texts from the Roman Missal can be faithfully translated into English in a beautiful and comprehensible manner without taking such liberties. The new translations will be more literal than those that we have been using, and it may at first seem awkward. Over time, as we grow more familiar with the new translations, you will hopefully see the greater richness of the prayers of the Mass and the many Biblical reference that are at present sometimes well-hidden.

A LOOK AT THE NEW TRANSLATION.

In the weeks ahead, this column will proceed through the “Ordinary” of the Mass, i.e. those prayers that do not vary from week to week such as the “Glory to God in the highest” and the Creed. We will examine the differences, and point out the theological significance when possible. The text of the Current Translation now in use will be set next to the New Translation, so that you may see all the changes for yourself. The rubrics (the instructions in the *Roman Missal* that tell the ministers what they are to do) will appear in a slightly smaller font and in italics. The spoken text of the Mass will be in standard font, and those words that vary between the two translations will be in bold.

The introduction of a New Translation provides an excellent opportunity for catechesis on the celebration of the Eucharist as well as a chance to grow in devotion to this most privileged manner of worship. With the aid of the Holy Spirit and the intercession of the Mother of God, model of the Church, may this be a fruitful time of renewal and spiritual growth.