

# 8 Reflections on the Roman Missal

## Number One: Why a New Mass?

The Church's liturgy is constantly adapting to present our faith and spiritual practices more authentically as our culture continues to change. These adaptations reflect the timeless truths of our faith and our liturgical heritage while remaining true to the language, faith and liturgy of the Roman Catholic Church. The current form of the Mass that we celebrate in English has remained unchanged since it was first implemented over 30 years ago. With the lessons we learned since its implementation, and paying attention to the best translation practices available to us today, we have a new opportunity to express what the Church believes. The New Missal uses language which is not only closer to the original prayers (many of which are over 1,000 years old) but also reflects a more "formal" or dignified way of addressing Almighty God. The New Missal also includes changes made to the Calendar of Saints with the addition of many new saints, including our Canadian St. Brother André! We do not often think of it, but there is indeed a "Roman" Catholic way of praying. With a distinctive liturgical style that is true to our heritage and our way of worshipping God going back close to two thousand years, the New Missal will be an opportunity for all of us to encounter the Roman Catholic Mass again for the first time.

## Number Two: Why New Words?

The language in which we pray together at Mass is special, a simple, dignified, formal way of talking to God. The language we use to speak with God should sound different than the everyday speech we use with our friends to help us remember Who we are praying to – God the Father, God the Son and God the Holy Spirit. Some parts of the New Mass will have noticeable changes, such as the Gloria or the Creed, but other parts have not changed, such as the Our Father. Many prayers at Mass will sound a little different than the words we have used for the last 30 years but this will give us a new opportunity to listen carefully to what we are saying when we pray. There

is an expression that reminds us that what we pray shows and teaches what we believe: *lex orandi, lex credendi*. It is quite amazing to think that the words we will be using are close to the way Catholic Christians prayed for many centuries: it is proof of the timeless and enduring faith of the Church that we will hand on to the next generation of Catholic Christians.

## Number Three: Why Do We Use Latin for Mass?

In the West, the Mother Tongue of the Church has been Latin since the Church was established in Rome. After the Second Vatican Council, the Church gave permission for the Mass to be translated from the official Latin version into other languages with the approval of the Vatican. Pope John Paul II first announced the New Missal eleven years ago. The English-speaking world is the first language group to translate the New Missal from the official, original Latin text. The Catholic Church continues to produce her official documents in Latin and in this way every language group has a common 'reference text' to use to make sure we are saying and meaning the same things. At the last World Youth Day in Australia, it was a powerful moment when youths from so many different cultures could pray the Our Father together in one voice in Latin. It was a powerful sign of our unity of faith in public prayer in the Mass. Latin will not replace English as the language in which we celebrate Mass on Sunday, but understanding its importance as the 'core' or original language of the Roman Catholic Church is helpful and important.

## Number Four: Why Does the New Mass Sound So Different?

When the Church decided to translate the New Latin Missal into English, the most up to date translation methods were used. Experts in Latin, liturgy, English, poetry, music and translation, as well as many other disciplines were all consulted in order to produce the best translation possible. The previous

translation tried to keep the sense of the words in English but it was not trying to be as literally accurate as possible. After thirty years of experience with the current translation we saw that we had lost some important content by loosely paraphrasing the Latin prayers into English. We also noticed how we had compromised the Roman-Latin style of the prayers. The New Missal has the most accurate translation of the Latin prayers and it is closest to what the Church prayed for centuries. Sometimes the translators had to use words or phrases that sound more formal or 'old fashioned' to translate the Latin words and ideas into English because that was the most accurate way to keep the original meaning. But almost all of the translations were able to balance a good, accurate translation with simple and dignified language and a Roman 'style' of prayer that help us to remember that we are speaking to God who is deserving of all of our love and respect.

## Number Five: Why "And With Your Spirit?"

In the current form of the Mass the response in English to the priest's greeting "The Lord be with you" is "And also with you." But in the New Missal the people's response changes to the literal translation from the Latin original "And with your spirit." One interesting fact is that the response in French, as in other languages too, has always been "And with your Spirit". The response "And with your Spirit" is based on sacred scripture and reflects the practice of the early Christians (see Galatians 6:18 and Timothy 4:22). It also importantly refers to the Spirit whom God has given to the priest at his ordination to speak in the liturgy not for himself but for Jesus Christ (*in persona capitis*). At 4 important times during Mass, the priest and the people share this dialogue back and forth where we recognize that we want and need God's presence with the priest who acts as Christ in the celebration of the sacraments. The greeting and response therefore are much richer and more significant than a friendly 'hello' or the expression of 'best wishes'.

## Number Six: Why the Changes to the Penitential Act?

There are several different options for this part of the Mass: we will look at the *Confiteor* (I Confess) this week. When we admit in public together that we have sinned, it emphasizes that we gather as a community where each person has need of God's mercy. This version is closer to the Latin original text and has strong connections to scripture: King David admitted to the Lord that he had greatly sinned (1 Chronicles 21:8); and the repetition that we have sinned through "my fault" three times and the striking of our breast with our fist recalls the tax collector who stood at the back of the temple who humbled himself before God (Luke 18:13). By striking our breast with a closed hand we show we want to crush the sin that lies in our heart and humble ourselves before God to receive His mercy. In the Prayer of Absolution the priest asks or petitions God to be merciful to us: "May almighty God have mercy on us, forgive us our sins and bring us to everlasting life". But this is not the absolution we receive in the Sacrament of Reconciliation. The emphasis in the whole Penitential Act is something very positive and hope-filled because it highlights our need and desire for God's loving, abundant, mercy.

## Number Seven: Why the Changes to the Gloria?

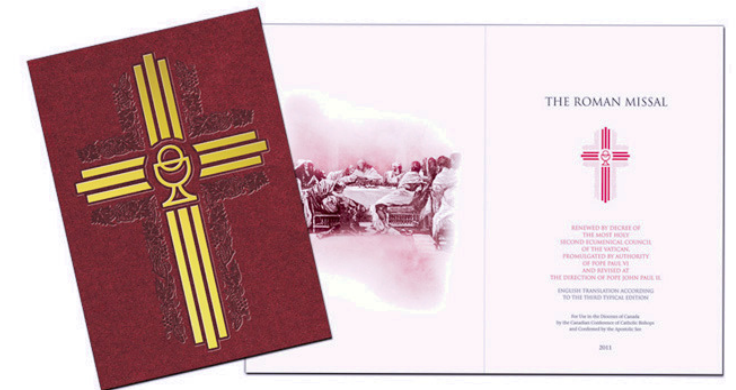
If we examine the previous text of the Gloria alongside the new version, we note that although the wording has been expanded, it does not sound very different. There are changes but it does not seem as if we are praying something altogether new. The new version makes it clear at the beginning of Mass that we are gathering to do something utterly different from whatever else we do during the week. We are participating with heaven and earth in the Divine Liturgy, blending our voices with those of angels and saints. The Gloria's opening words repeat the message of the angels to the shepherds at the birth of Christ: "Glory to God in the highest and on earth peace to people of good will" (Luke 2:14). Though human, we are privileged to join the angels in praising God and participate in the heavenly

liturgy. The Gloria possesses rhetorical devices, such as repeating a word or a phrase, that reflect speech patterns from early Christianity. They highlight the reality that this is no ordinary "thank you" we are expressing to a friend or loved one. Instead, we are joining angelic choirs in adoring the Trinity.

## Number Eight: Changes to the Creed:

The word "creed" comes from the Latin "credo" which means "I believe". In the Nicene Creed we notice right away the change from "we believe" to "I believe". When we express our faith using the Creed we are expressing not only what the Church as a whole believes but what we as individual Christians with a personal relationship with God the Father, Son and Holy Spirit believe. Some of the other changes might seem minor, like the change to "visible and invisible" from "seen and unseen" but even these small changes reflect a deeper meaning. An object is 'unseen' when something else blocks our view of it, but invisible realities, like the angels for example, are always 'unseen' but that doesn't make them less real! There are other changes too that more accurately reflect our faith that will need to be explained in more detail such as the words "consubstantial with the Father" and "incarnate of the Virgin Mary". It might seem like we are being very picky about the words we use, but how we pray reflects and shapes our beliefs and so we ought to use words which convey as accurately as possible our strongly held beliefs.

## 8 Reflections on the Roman Missal



The following reflections on the new translation of the Roman Missal were written by Rev. Geoff Kerslake