

The Mass, Ever Ancient, Ever New *Part One*

By Fr. Edward Horkan

This article describes the background and rationale for the new translation of the Mass. I will give a more lengthy explanation of the individual changes this Wednesday, November 16 at 7:30, in Heller Hall with an opportunity for questions and answers afterward.

In the liturgies of the Church and especially in the Mass, “we take part in the beginning of the heavenly liturgy which is celebrated in the holy city of Jerusalem toward which we journey as pilgrims.” So declared *Sacrosanctum Concilium*, the Vatican II Council’s constitution on the liturgy. The words of liturgies should help us sense this heavenly company and their joy in the worship of God. The basic elements of the Mass are fixed, but the specific words can change over time to give people a sense of this celestial journey. As you may have heard, the Church in America will be using a different translation for many of the prayers of the Mass starting the first Sunday in Advent, the weekend of November 26-27. This new translation does not change any of the practices of the Mass and aims to give a more mystical and scriptural feel to our worship. There are booklets in our church’s entrances that describe some of the more important changes in the translation. Laminated cards for the newly translated Mass responses of the people will be available in the pews starting that first weekend of Advent.

The rite of the Mass that was used before Vatican II, often called the Tridentine Rite, was developed in the area around Rome from the early Church onward. In order to respond to Protestant denominations and many legitimate concerns of faithful Catholics, the Council of Trent met from 1545 through 1563. To bring more order, unity, and dignity to the Mass, Pope Saint Pius V took a modified Roman rite with its simultaneous emphasis on dignity and mystery and made it universal for the entire Latin Church, i.e. the Church of Western Europe and the areas evangelized by Western Europeans which now includes most of the world. The Council of Trent and Pius V considered more popular participation and use of vernacular languages, but concluded that it would be better to leave such changes to a later time.

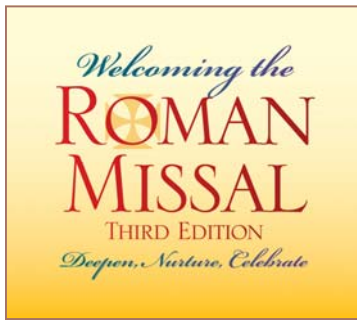
Starting about the mid-nineteenth century, with rising literacy and popular devotions, the call for more active participation in the Mass increased. Things such as more popular hymns and

explanations of the Mass, including Latin-English missals, became commonplace. In the twentieth century Pope St. Pius X promoted frequent Communion, lowered the age of First Communion to seven, and encouraged more participation in singing during the Mass. In the 1947 encyclical *Mediator Dei*, Pope Pius XII also encouraged more popular participation in the Mass, avoiding either routineness or an excessive showiness more fitted to entertainment than timeless worship. When Blessed John XXIII launched the Second Vatican Council, its first document was *Sacrosanctum Concilium*, which called for a full and active participation of the people in the liturgy. In particular, the Council document promoted reforms along four main lines: (1) more of a noble simplicity; (2) a broader scope of scriptural readings; (3) more emphasis on homilies and instruction; and (4) the increased use of vernacular languages, although Latin was to be preserved.

To enact these changes, there were transitional missals and then a final missal in 1969, with minor changes afterward. The prayers and readings were first written in Latin and then translated into all other languages. Translations are usually difficult and such a massive project had never been done. The effort was entrusted to language committees including the International Committee for English in the Liturgy (ICEL). The final products were submitted to the bishops of each country and then to the Vatican for approval or changes.

ICEL and the other committees worked as quickly as possible. ICEL published the English translation in 1974, which was accepted with some changes by the bishops and the Vatican. That translation was never meant to be the final product; it was understood that, after some reflection and experience, ICEL and the Vatican would make changes later. Starting in 1984, ICEL began working on a new translation of both the Sacramentary, which contains the prayers of the Mass, and the Lectionary, which contains the scriptural readings for the Mass. By 2001, ICEL and the Vatican had agreed on the new translation of the Lectionary. The Sacramentary has taken more time, but a final translation was finished in 2007, accepted by the United States bishops in 2009, and approved by the Vatican in 2010. It is that new translation, not any fundamental change in the Mass, that will begin this Advent.

Next week’s article addresses some of the more important changes that people will notice in the Mass.



The Mass, Ever Ancient, Ever New

Part Two

By Fr. Edward Horkan

Last week's article reviewed the overall background to the new translations for the Mass prayers that the Church in this nation will be using, starting this Advent. This article will describe a few of the more important changes in the prayers, especially with reference to the prayers that the people pray. There will be substantial revisions to the translation of the prayers that the priest prays, such as the Opening Prayer, the Prayer after Communion, and the Eucharistic Prayer, i.e. the prayer over the bread and wine, when they become the Body and Blood of Christ. However, the International Committee on English in the Liturgy, which drew up the draft of the translations, and the bishops and Vatican who made revisions, tried to make relatively few changes in the prayers that the people say or sing.

Overall, the new translations will emphasize a more faithful adherence to the original Latin texts, as well as a more mystical and Scriptural language. For example, there are four times when the priest or deacon says, "The Lord be with you," during the Mass: at the beginning, before the Gospel, before the sign of peace, and at the end. Currently, the response is "and also with you." The new response will instead be "and also with your spirit." This new response not only adheres to the original Latin better, but also reflects the ancient practice of the Church which recognizes that a priest or deacon receives a specific spirit of courage, wisdom and love at ordination, for which the people pray.¹ The priest gives the people a greeting common in the Bible and the greeting the angel Gabriel gave Mary at the Annunciation.² Our response, then, is a prayer like those of Jesus for His Apostles and St. Paul for clergy of the early Church: that the spirit of holiness given to the priest at ordination continue to guide His ministry.

On Sundays and other high Masses, the priest and people recite an ancient profession of faith, called the Nicene Creed, after the Gospel and the homily.

Until now we have begun the Creed with "We believe," an expression that currently occurs four times, once each for the Father, the Son, the Holy Spirit, and then for the Church. That phrase will be changed to "I believe" at the beginning. (We will continue to follow this profession of belief with a recognition of our common baptism and hope in the world to come.) As the Catechism makes clear, beginning this or any creed with "We believe" or "I believe" can be accurate. Saying "We believe" expresses the unity of our faith throughout space and time; saying "I believe" emphasizes our own personal commitment.³ The Creed at Mass has historically used the term "I believe," as we will now, to emphasize that each of us must make our own commitment to enter into Mass and receive Communion with complete faith.

Later, when the priest holds up the Eucharist before Communion, he will now say, "Behold the Lamb of God, behold Him who takes away the sins of the world. Blessed are those called to the supper of the Lamb." The first line reflects more directly St. John the Baptist's call to follow Christ, and the last phrase the heavenly wedding feast of the Lamb described in the Book of Revelation.⁴ The replacement of the word "happy" with "blessed" reflects the fact that on earth happiness and sadness are emotions, both fit at different times, but that blessedness in an enduring grace coming from friendship with God, as, for example, the Beatitudes show. Likewise, the current response, "Lord I am not worthy to receive you, but only say the word and I shall be healed" will now be "Lord, I am not worthy that You should enter under my roof, but only say the word and my soul shall be healed." The new translation is more faithful to the Latin and reflects the words of the centurion who asked Jesus to cure his son.⁵ Jesus praised his faith, and that faith is an example for us as we journey on to God's heavenly banquet, of which the Mass is a first promise.

¹John 14:16-17, 15:26-27, 16:13-15;
²Tim. 1:7, 13-14, 4:22.

²Judges 6:12; Ruth 2:4; 2 Chron. 15:2; Luke 1:28.

³Catechism of the Catholic Church
26, 166-167.

⁴John 1:29, 36; Rev. 19:9.

⁵Matt. 8:5-12; Luke 7:1-10.