



Embracing Change in the Liturgy



For many people, change does not come easy. Change requires us to stop doing things a certain way in order to do something else. Many people find comfort in familiar routines and known ways of acting. Change interrupts those familiar routines. But change is also an opportunity to stop and reflect on what we are doing and to come to a better understanding of God, who does not change.

Why does the Church change the Liturgy?

In its Liturgy, the Church always attempts to follow the “norm of the holy Fathers.” This effort “requires not only the preservation of what our immediate forebears have handed on to us, but also an understanding and a more profound pondering of the Church’s entire past. . . . this broader view allows us to see how the Holy Spirit endows the People of God with a marvelous fidelity in preserving the unalterable deposit of faith, even though there is a very great variety of prayers and rites” (*General Instruction of the Roman Missal*, no. 9).

The Liturgy must, therefore, always celebrate and make present the Paschal Sacrifice of Christ—his saving Passion, death, Resurrection, and Ascension. However, over time, it may become necessary to make certain changes, such as adding prayers for recently canonized saints and adding texts that reflect the needs that the People of God wish to bring to God in prayer. The third edition of the *Roman Missal* makes such additions and provides a fresh translation of the Latin texts of the existing content of the *Missal*.

Who decides that the Liturgy should change?

Pope John Paul II approved the promulgation of the third edition of the *Missale Romanum*, the Latin text, on April 20, 2000. The final Latin edition of the revised text was published in March 2002. The Congregation for Divine Worship and the Discipline of the Sacraments was responsible for preparing the text. The Congregation is the Vatican office that the pope has charged with overseeing all matters related to the Liturgy and the sacraments. Any changes in the words of the sacramental formulas—the essential words in the celebration of each of the sacraments (either in Latin or in vernacular translations)—must be approved by the Holy Father personally. In addition, church law also gives to conferences

of bishops (such as the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops) as well as individual bishops certain responsibilities with regard to the Liturgy.

What exactly is changing?

The structure of the Mass (the order of the elements, the actions of the priest celebrant, and so forth) remains unchanged in the new edition of the *Roman Missal*. However, the translation of the prayer texts will change to more closely reflect the original Latin texts. In some cases, new options for prayers may be available, and some old options may no longer be present.

Will the changes be noticeable?

In the third edition of the *Roman Missal*, almost every prayer in the Mass—those spoken by the priest and those spoken by the people—has been retranslated from the Latin to English. Some prayers now recited by memory will need to be relearned, and the familiar language of many prayers recited by the priest will change.

In preparing the new translation, the translators were asked to make the English texts conform more closely to the Latin originals and to retain traditional theological vocabulary that communicates important concepts of the faith. The language that the faithful will hear and pray is more formal and somewhat more complex than the language of ordinary conversation. It conveys rich theological concepts and retains biblical language and images.

How can I prepare for the change?

There are many ways in which you can prepare for the changes in the Mass:

- ✘ Make a conscious effort to participate more fully in the Mass each Sunday and holy day.
- ✘ Take advantage of any special catechetical sessions offered by your parish or diocese.
- ✘ Visit the *Roman Missal* Web site (www.usccb.org/romanmissal) to study the new texts and to learn more about the changes.
- ✘ Read the new texts of the people’s parts at Mass. Begin to study them so that you will be able to pray them well when the new *Roman Missal* is implemented.
- ✘ Pray for a renewal of love for the Liturgy in your parish and in the Church.

What difference will these changes make in my parish?

Some of the differences will be obvious immediately. We will have to learn new musical settings for the various parts of the Mass. We will learn new words for common prayers, such as the Creed. Those of us who began saying the Mass prayers by heart long ago will need to rely on printed texts again, at least for a while. In the early months of the transition, we may find it more challenging to pray with one voice as people adjust to the new texts and gradually commit them to their hearts.

But these surface differences will give way to deeper and more significant changes. If we use the time of preparation well, we will make the changes with a deeper understanding of the Liturgy and a renewed reverence for and appreciation of the Mass. We will hear the prayers with new ears and with new hearts. Our Liturgy will be filled with new life and new spirit as we celebrate the Paschal Mystery of Christ made present for us.

Where can I turn for help in understanding these changes?

The first stop for catechesis and formation regarding these changes is your parish and diocese. All the faithful are encouraged to take advantage of parish efforts. You can attend catechetical sessions, read articles in the parish bulletin or newsletter or the diocesan newspaper, listen closely to homilies that help explain the changes, and come early to Mass to practice new musical settings for the prayers.

In addition, many dioceses, schools, universities, and retreat centers will offer programs to help people understand and appreciate the new translation. You can take advantage of these programs where possible.

The official Web site for the third edition of the *Roman Missal* is found at www.usccb.org/romanmissal. A variety of resources will be posted that may help you.

Catholic publishers and national organizations will publish many resources, in print and online, to help you negotiate this time of change. Check out your parish book rack or your local Catholic bookstore to see what is available.

What if I don't like the new translation?

For most people, the unfamiliar is always uncomfortable, at least at first. The more familiar the old is, the more challenging it may be to accept and embrace the new. It is completely normal to feel uncomfortable as you begin studying and reading the new texts. Taking steps to become more familiar

with the texts can help a great deal. At the same time, be open to the possibility that you will find things to appreciate in the rich language of the new texts. The more you read them and study them and pray them, the more familiar and comfortable they will become and the more you will appreciate the theological depth they convey.

Taking the time to learn more about your faith, including the Mass and Scripture, can help you appreciate the new texts more fully. Using the catechetical opportunities made available by your parish and diocese can help you overcome concerns about the changes.

Finally, you can take your concerns to God in prayer. Pray for a deeper understanding of the meaning of these texts and for an open heart to grow in communion with the Church.

What can I do to make the process of change a good one for my parish?

Everyone has a role to play in preparing to use the new translations:

- ✘ Study the new texts with an open heart and an open mind so that you will be ready to use them in the Liturgy.
- ✘ Take advantage of opportunities to learn more about the new texts by attending catechetical programs and reading articles about the new texts.
- ✘ Offer to assist your pastor or parish director of religious education in preparing parish catechetical events.
- ✘ If you are a parent, teach your children the new prayers and help them to understand the changes. Encourage them to participate in the Mass fully and to learn more about their faith.
- ✘ Be very intentional about celebrating the Liturgy each Sunday and holy day. Arrive on time (or a bit early). Pray and sing with attentiveness. Stay focused on the action of the Liturgy rather than letting your mind wander. Hold the Sacrament of the Eucharist in great reverence. Finally, give thanks to God in your heart for so great a gift.

Times of change are always a challenge. But from this challenge can come a deeper appreciation of who we are as the Body of Christ, gathering to celebrate the Paschal Mystery of the Lord.

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