

## Part III of the Easter Vigil in the Third Edition of the Roman Missal

Paul Turner

The third edition of the Roman Missal has introduced some changes to the third part of the Easter Vigil. These should help clarify some of the logistics and underscore the meaning of the rites of initiation.

Although the introduction of the English-language edition of the *Missale Romanum* has focused on issues of translation, one of the main reasons for the new book pertains to its content. Small but significant changes happened between the second and third Latin editions of the missal. These have nothing to do with principles of translation, but they affect how we do things when Catholics gather to pray.

The Easter Vigil unfolds in four parts: The Solemn Beginning of the Vigil or Lucernarium, the Liturgy of the Word, [the] Baptismal Liturgy, and the Liturgy of the Eucharist. Even though there are elements of initiation in all four parts (for example, the lighting of the paschal candle, the catechetical elements of the readings, and the climactic participation in communion), this article will focus only on Part III.<sup>1</sup>

For ease of comprehension, the changes will be grouped under categories. For the sake of context, here is an outline of the sequence of events as contained in the missal: The Litany of the Saints may accompany a procession to the font. The priest blesses the water, and the people make an acclamation. Those to be baptized make their promises. They are baptized. Postbaptismal ceremonies include the clothing with a white garment and the lighting of candles. Newly-baptized adults are confirmed. The faithful renew their baptismal promises and are sprinkled with baptismal water. All – including the newly baptized – join in the Universal Prayer, or the Prayer of the Faithful.

Changes can be noted under these categories: ritual clarifications, the inclusion of infants, the role of the deacon, possible confusions, chants, and editorial enhancements.

### Ritual clarifications

For the procession to the font, the revised missal gives a more detailed description of the order of participants (39).<sup>2</sup> A minister with the paschal candle leads. Those to be baptized follow with their godparents. If this group includes infants, their parents also go along (38). The ministers (altar servers), the deacon and the priest come at the end.

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<sup>1</sup> I have treated similar themes in “The Christian Initiation Masses in the *Missale Romanum*,” *Catechumenate: A Journal of Christian Initiation* 26/2 (March 2004):2-9; *Celebrating Initiation: A Guide for Priests* (Chicago: World Library Publications, 2008); and *Glory in the Cross: Holy Week in the Third Edition of the Roman Missal* (Collegeville: Pueblo, 2011). This article is based on a paper I presented at the twenty-third Congress of Societas Liturgica, in Reims, France, on August 9, 2011.

<sup>2</sup> Numbers in parentheses refer to the paragraphs pertaining to the Easter Vigil in the Roman Missal.

When the priest blesses the baptismal water, he extends his hands (44). This probably seems perfectly natural; the priest normally extends his hands when offering a prayer. However, previous editions of the missal (sacramentary) have instructed him to join his hands for this blessing. There is a long history to that gesture, but the *Book of Blessings* has more recently introduced a distinction: lay ministers may offer blessings, and they do so with hands joined; whereas a priest or deacon blesses with hands extended.

Adults who were not anointed with the oil of catechumens during the preparatory rites are anointed after the renunciation and before the profession of faith (48). This seems to change the current legislation in the United States, where the anointing is not to be done during the preparatory rites (called the “preparation rites” in the *Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults*) “or in the celebration of initiation at the Easter Vigil or at another time” (RCIA 7). The legislation in the RCIA probably reflects the mindset of the time, which favored minimizing the usage of the oil of catechumens. In fact, the entire blessing of the oil of catechumens may be removed from the diocesan Chrism Mass if the conference of bishops has decided to eliminate its usage altogether. The revised rubrics for the Vigil demonstrate a preference for using the oil of catechumens. In the history of the catechumenate, this anointing was often associated with the scrutinies, not with the period of the catechumenate as it is today. It was sometimes called “the oil of exorcism” because it sealed the exorcism embedded within the scrutiny. In this way, its emergence at the Easter Vigil helps interpret the trajectory that leads from the scrutinies to the renunciation. The questions “Do you renounce?” are aimed at discerning whether or not the exorcisms took effect. The anointing with the oil of catechumens gives a final seal upon the decisive Christological commitment of those to be baptized. No mention is made of anointing infants. Presumably the practice is omitted in their case.

If the number of those to be baptized is large, the celebrant may invite the renewal of baptismal promises of all present “immediately after the response of those to be baptized and of the godparents and the parents” (49). Logically, this would not speed things up at all – it just moves the renewal of promises from one part of the ritual to another. However, where the renewal is actually described (55), it follows the baptisms “unless this has already been done together with those to be baptized.” This envisions that the celebrant asks the questions once, not multiple times. As to what a “large” number is, one would think that this concerns certain missionary areas where hundreds of baptisms may take place at one time. However, Pope Benedict XVI exercised this option while baptizing six at the Easter Vigil in St. Peter’s Basilica.<sup>3</sup> Surprisingly, this unified the individual renunciation and profession of those to be baptized with the renewal of promises for all those in attendance.

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<sup>3</sup> “Veglia Pasquale nella notte santa,” [http://www.vatican.va/news\\_services/liturgy/libretti/2011/20110423\\_veglia.pdf](http://www.vatican.va/news_services/liturgy/libretti/2011/20110423_veglia.pdf), pp. 54-55, accessed September 5, 2011.

After those to be baptized make their promises, the priest baptizes them (50). This should be obvious, but previous editions of the missal and sacramentary oddly never told the priest when to baptize. He saw what preceded and what followed baptism, but the book never indicated when to perform the sacrament. He had to look at the RCIA to find out.

All the newly baptized receive a white garment, and their candles are lighted (51). This either ignores or changes the rubric in RCIA 229, which makes optional the clothing with a baptismal garment. In practice, it seems that most parishes do offer a garment, but the rubric has been strengthened in the missal. The ephphetha rite for infants is omitted, probably because it was performed with the adults in the preparation rites (RCIA 199). Curiously, it normally follows the baptism of infants (Rite of Baptism for Children 65), though it is always optional.<sup>4</sup> If the Vigil inserted the ephphetha at this point, it would only be given to infants, which would make people wonder why not to adults.

If the baptisms did not take place in the sanctuary, a procession forms to return there (52). Meanwhile, a chant (any baptismal song) may be sung, as the Litany of the Saints accompanied the movement to the baptistery. For the first time the missal suggests *Vidi aquam* as one appropriate antiphon here. The sprinkling that follows also recommends *Vidi aquam* (56), but the procession now offers another opportunity for its use. Historically the sprinkling rites of the Easter season called for *Vidi aquam*, so it fits a little better in the latter position.

The bishop confirms, or in his absence, the priest who conferred baptism does so (53). Of course, it is highly unlikely that a bishop will be present for the parish Vigil, but he is the ordinary minister of confirmation, so the rubric acknowledges his responsibilities, which are more theological than realistic here. Confirmation takes place “in the sanctuary, as is indicated in the Roman Pontifical or the Roman Ritual.” However, RCIA 231, to which this rubric refers, says confirmation is celebrated “either at the baptismal font or in the sanctuary, depending on the place where, according to local conditions, baptism has been celebrated.”

### The inclusion of children

The reader has already noted several places above that account for the presence of infants to be baptized at the Vigil. The RBC, which has been in use since 1969, has always said this in its introduction: “To bring out the paschal character of baptism, it is recommended that the sacrament be celebrated during the Easter Vigil or on Sunday, when the Church commemorates the Lord’s resurrection.”<sup>5</sup> Most Catholics know that

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<sup>4</sup> Maxwell E. Johnson writes that its location in the RBC “might seem to suggest that, in the case of infants, baptism itself is also a kind of enrollment in the catechumenate, where, at some point in the development of future faith, the ears of the baptized might ‘receive [God’s] word,’ and their mouths might ‘proclaim his faith’ (no. 65).” Although it is unlikely that any baptism should be considered an enrollment in the catechumenate, it is possible that the movement of the ephphetha to this location was prompted by the realistic views so common to the postconciliar church; in this case, that the opening of ears and lips would accompany not the infants’ baptism, but their catechetical development.

<sup>5</sup> RBC 9.

Sundays are preferred for baptisms, but few realize that the Easter Vigil is the first option mentioned. Even so, neither the RBC nor the sacramentary has ever explained how to do it. Now the missal does.

Predictably, parents and godparents carry children in procession (38). They make the baptismal promises on behalf of the children (48 and 49). The children are baptized when the adults are (50).

Following baptism and before any of the other rites, the priest anoints infants with chrism on the crown of their head (51). The liturgy carefully distinguishes this action from confirmation. The accompanying text has more to do with Christ than with the Holy Spirit. The location of the anointing is the crown of the head, not the forehead. Two symbols – the white garment and the candle – intervene before confirmation, and if the missal really means that confirmation should take place in the sanctuary, then the procession and relocation of the action also makes the ceremonies distinct. Because the same priest uses the same jar of chrism for both anointings, the liturgy has to make sure people understand that this anointing of infants is not the same as confirming an adult. When a bishop presides, he recites the words, but assisting priests or deacons anoint the infants (Ceremonial of Bishops 365). This is a rare instance in which two different people perform the words and actions of a liturgical act; the liturgy goes to greater lengths when a bishop presides to avoid any confusion with confirmation.

### The role of the deacon

All the rubrics of Holy Week have been revised in the third edition of the missal, not just those that pertain to Part III of the Vigil. The role of the deacon has been clarified from Palm Sunday through Easter Sunday. Deacons will find it rewarding to study these rubrics thoroughly.

During the Vigil, the deacon processes just before the priest on his way from the sanctuary to the font and back again (39 and 41). When it is time to light the candles of the newly baptized, he or the priest may receive the paschal candle (51). In some instances baptisms take place in the sanctuary with a vessel of water, instead of at the font – primarily for visibility. If this happens, the vessel should be removed to make room for the liturgy of the eucharist. The deacon is assigned this task, together with other ministers, who reverently carry the water away to the font (57).

### Possible confusions

Even with all this clarity, there are some elements that still look confusing. For example, at the beginning of the baptismal liturgy, those to be baptized are called “catechumens” (38), even though the Rite of Election has changed their status to “the elect.” The word “catechumen” appeared in the earlier editions of the postconciliar missal, and it was not changed here, probably due to an oversight. Several paragraphs later, the new sentence that tells when baptism should occur says more precisely, “the Priest baptizes the adult elect” (50).

The Vigil provides an option for all to renew their baptismal promises earlier when the number of those to be baptized is large. It is not clear what “large” means, and the rubrics at one place say that the faithful renew their promises “immediately after the response” of those to be baptized (49), and in another place that they speak “together with” those to be baptized (55). The second interpretation makes more sense if the goal is to save some time, but it means that the liturgy makes no distinction between those professing their faith for the first time and those who are making their annual renewal. It would surely heighten the significance of baptism to hear the elect renounce and profess as individuals, rather than as one with all.

The missal predictably is silent about the Rite of Reception. Even in the *editio typica* of the RCIA, the *Ordo initiationis christianae adultorum*, the Rite of Reception was never included in the Easter Vigil. The combined rite with which so many parishes are familiar was a concession made to several conferences of bishops, including the United States and Canada, because of the large number of validly baptized candidates in preparation for joining the Catholic Church. The missal’s silence on this point does not directly affect the current practice because the combined rite exists in an approved liturgical book. However, permission to keep the combined rite will have to be evaluated whenever the RCIA comes up for a revised translation in the coming years.<sup>6</sup>

The rubrics for the Universal Prayer, or Prayer of the Faithful, are silent about their content, but discussions prior to the revision of the postconciliar missal promoted an idea worth knowing.<sup>7</sup> The newly baptized participate in the prayer of the faithful for the first time as members of the community; hence, there should not be a petition for them. Rather, they should be praying with the community for the needs of others.

## Chants

Those who promote more singing at the eucharist are surely cheered by the editorial decision to include in the missal more chants than appeared in previous publications of the sacramentary. This is true especially in the liturgies of Holy Week. In Part III of the Vigil, music appears in many places.

The priest may sing the introduction to the baptismal liturgy and the litany. Notes are provided for the sample text (40). However, this text may be varied – which opens the door for the priest to improvise his singing as well as his words. The blessing of water is also set to music, as is the acclamation of the people. These have been available in the sacramentary, but the notation is new to the Latin third edition of the missal (44). The text for *Vidi aquam* is given (56), and any replacement song should be “baptismal in character.”

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<sup>6</sup> Readers of this journal know that I have questioned the wisdom of receiving baptized Christians into the Church at the Easter Vigil. “Receiving Candidates One by One,” *Catechumenate: A Journal of Christian Initiation* 29/4 (July 2007):2-8, accessible from my web site, [www.paulturner.org](http://www.paulturner.org).

<sup>7</sup> Schemata no. 278, D. 21, ad 96. Archives of the International Commission on English in the Liturgy.

## Editorial enhancements

Admittedly, these are small matters, but some editorial improvements have happened. These demonstrate the careful editing of the Latin third edition of the missal – improvements that have carried over to the English translation.

The instructions concerning the location for celebrating baptism have been moved from the end of Part II to the beginning of Part III (37). They pertain more to the baptismal liturgy than to the liturgy of the word.

In the Litany of the Saints (43), the opening invocations to Christ are lined out more clearly, and the names of some of the saints have been clarified. For example, Teresa is no longer “of Avila” but “of Jesus.”

## The translation

The words to be spoken, sung, and heard in Part III have also been retranslated. Rather than conduct a thorough investigation of them here, let it suffice to say that, as with the rest of the project, the results have provoked discussion. The introduction to the baptismal liturgy sounds more formal: “Dearly beloved, / with one heart and one soul, let us by our prayers / come to the aid of these our brothers and sisters in their blessed hope. . . .” (40). The prayers include unusual vocabulary: “send forth the spirit of adoption / to create the new peoples / brought to birth for you in the font of Baptism.” The lengthy prayer of blessing baptismal water includes one sentence that stretches for 29 lines (46). The words for the renewal of baptismal promises will now differ from the actual baptismal promises. The missal contains a new translation for the renewal; for example, “Do you renounce the lure of evil, / so that sin may have no mastery over you?” (55); but the promises are in the unretranslated RCIA and RBC.

Nonetheless, the translation’s main strength draws from its determination to offer English-speakers a more accurate acquisition of the original meaning of our prayers.

## Conclusion

Although the third edition of the missal has fixed people’s attentions on translation, the rubrical enhancements are significant, as evidenced in the revised Part III of the Easter Vigil. Here can be seen a greater deference to the role of the deacon, the promotion of singing, the careful inclusion of infants to be baptized, and greater attention to signs and symbols from the use of the oil of catechumens to the desire for visibility to enhance the participation of the faithful. These changes came about largely because of the experience of praying the postconciliar liturgy. They demonstrate how the Roman liturgy continues to evolve, and they give people more reason to make the Easter Vigil the most important event of their spiritual life.

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