

Future Mass Text Changes

Catholics expect some changes to the words in the liturgy from time to time. But they will soon be using the first mass texts since the Second Vatican Council that have been created according to a different theory of translation. The revision will have a noticeable effect on the style and sound of the texts of the mass. Some Catholics are looking forward to these changes with hungry anticipation; others are hoping that the laborious process of translation and approval will eat the clock. Still others – including many priests – are blithely unaware of the changes to come.

The current Sacramentary is the English translation of the second Latin edition of a book entitled *Missale Romanum*. The third edition was promulgated in 2002; its translation into vernacular languages is in progress. Many of the changes made will slip beneath the radar: new vigil masses for the Epiphany and the Ascension, some new votive masses, a rearrangement of the masses for various needs and occasions, and the addition of several saints' days on the universal calendar, to name but a few. The most notable changes are a consequence of the Vatican's decision to apply a different theory of translation in preparing the text. So even though the Latin words have not much changed from the second to the third edition, the English words have. It will sound like a very different book, starting with the title. Instead of using the Sacramentary, we will be praying from the Roman Missal.

Some Catholics are wary of the new translation because other recent changes to the mass have been controversial, from the restriction of duties for extraordinary ministers of holy communion, to the revised translation of the lectionary. Those who worked on the first English translation of the Sacramentary forty years ago now find their contributions criticized, often unfairly.

The new translation will affect the people in the nave, not just the ministers in the sanctuary. Everyone will notice alterations to the texts they say and hear. A Church that has been praying the same English words for four decades may rightly wonder if the revisions will improve its common prayer. This is indeed the intent of the new translation, but it represents a change, and change is always hard.

While this article quotes several draft texts of the revised missal, none of these has reached its final form, although a revised Glory to God and Holy Holy have been approved for limited use at World Youth Day this summer in Sydney, Australia. All texts are subject to final approval from the Congregation for Divine Worship and the Discipline of the Sacraments. That approval will probably come at the end of the entire project – not piecemeal – so that the missal may be reviewed as a complete unit.

Catholics will immediately notice changes to some of the most common texts of the mass. Pending approval, here are some samples from the greeting, the Glory to God, the Creed, and the memorial acclamations:

- “The Lord be with you.” “And with your spirit.”
- “Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace to people of good will. We praise you, we bless you, we adore you, we glorify you, we give you thanks for your great glory.”
- “I believe in one God, the Father almighty, maker of heaven and earth, of all things visible and invisible.”
- “We proclaim your death, O Lord, and profess your resurrection until you come in glory.”

Other proposed changes are less dramatic. Consider, for example, the Confiteor and the Holy Holy:

- “I confess to almighty God and to you, my brothers and sisters, that I have sinned greatly. . . through my fault, through my fault, through my most grievous fault.”
- “Holy, Holy, Holy is the Lord God of hosts. Heaven and earth are full of your glory.”

Still other parts of the mass are not expected to change at all, such as the Lord’s Prayer and the Lamb of God.

What people hear – not just what they say – will also change. New translations have been proposed for all the presidential prayers, including the eucharistic prayers. The grammar will be more complex, the word order more varied, and the vocabulary more expansive.

For example, the draft of the collect for the First Sunday of Advent reads, “Grant, we pray, almighty God, that your faithful may resolve to run forth with righteous deeds, to meet your Christ who is coming, so that gathered at his right hand they may be worthy to possess the heavenly kingdom.” The sentence is longer than we are accustomed to hearing in English, but it is the same length as the one currently in use for this prayer in French, Italian and Spanish.

The proposed collect for the Fourth Sunday of Advent is similarly complex, but it already enjoys popularity as the concluding prayer of the Angelus: “Pour forth, we beseech you, O Lord, your grace into our hearts, that we to whom the incarnation of Christ your Son was made known by the message of an Angel may by his Passion and Cross be brought to the glory of the resurrection.”

The elevated style of these prayers will surely cause an adjustment in the way the priest speaks them, and in the way the people hear them. Some fear that the prayers of the mass that are already hard to comprehend will become even more remote. Others think that the

richness of the vocabulary and style in the proposed translations will stand up to repetition, study, and prayerful reflection.

Some allusions to scripture will be more explicit. For example, the collect for the First Sunday of Advent quoted above makes a direct reference to Matthew 25:34 (“gathered at his right hand they may be worthy to possess the heavenly kingdom”). It is less clear in the current translation (“call us to his side in the kingdom of heaven”).

Part of Eucharistic Prayer IV today reads, “He always loved those who were his own in the world. When the time came for him to be glorified by you, his heavenly Father, he showed the depth of his love.” The proposed revision makes a stronger connection to John 13:1-2. “For when the hour had come for him to be glorified by you, Father most holy, having loved his own who were in the world, he loved them to the end.”

Throughout, the new translation strives for texts that can be proclaimed in an understandable way. It is not always easy. Some of the longer orations are being broken up into independent parts, and some words get reworked to facilitate understanding. For example, an early draft of the collect for the Feast of the Visitation began this way: “Almighty, everlasting God, who inspired the Virgin Mary to visit Elizabeth while bearing your Son in her womb. . . .” It was not clear whose womb was carrying the Son of God. A later revision proposes this: “Almighty, everlasting God, while the Blessed Virgin Mary was carrying your Son in her womb, you inspired her to visit Elizabeth. . . .”

Many of the texts will be sung, so their cadence and rhythm have received extra attention. The conclusions to the prefaces, for example, are drafted in a way that draws the text to a strong close and signals the start of the Holy Holy. Two examples are “for ever crying out to your glory,” and “we sing the hymn of your praise and acclaim without end.” Phrases such as these are designed to produce a good sound when sung.

The use or avoidance of inclusive language can have a serious effect on the ability of some worshipers to pray. It can be argued that the Sacramentary brought these issues to the fore; before the vernacular translations, inclusive language was not much debated. But once the Sacramentary was published, people began reacting to its choice of words. The 1974 version of the words of consecration, for example, included the phrase “for you and for all men.” By 1985 the word “men” was dropped.

More results will be seen in the revised translation. For example, almost all the current opening prayers address God as Father. Decades ago, this was thought to be a warmer word than “God”, which would have been a more literal choice for the Latin word “Deus” that begins these prayers. “Father” is more familial, but of course it also carries gender-specific freight. The new translation consistently uses “God” in these instances, a form of address that many worshipers will find more appealing. Almost universally throughout the draft of

the missal, “brothers” now appears as “brothers and sisters”, and words such as “man” have been recast as “humanity”, “people” or “men and women.”

Not everyone will be pleased with the results. The pronouns referring to God remain masculine. And there are times when the draft leaves the word “man” in place, largely because it was difficult to find a different solution, even after having discussed several alternatives. Still, those concerned about inclusive language should discover many improvements designed to ease their entrance into the spirit of prayer.

Some significant changes will probably never be evident to worshipers. For example, an early draft of the collect for the mass for persecuted Christians prayed to God for those “who suffer because of your name.” The word “persecution”, which appears clearly in Latin, was missing from the draft after the word “suffer”, making the prayer sound tepid. Since the traumatic persecution of Christians continues in many parts of the world today, it demands the prayerful attention of the Church. The word “persecution” was restored to make the intent of the prayer more explicit. No one will notice the refinement, but the very unobtrusive sound of the phrase signals its success as a translation.

Beyond the issues of translation, the third edition of the missal will include some editorial improvements that should make a difference in how the mass sounds. The presider’s texts will be divided with greater attention to sense lines and page turns. The Eucharistic Prayer for Masses for Various Needs and Occasions, currently available only in a volume separate from the Sacramentary, will appear between the same two covers as all the other eucharistic prayers. This accessibility should increase its usage. Single-use prefaces will appear on the same page as other presidential prayers for the feast in question. These small editorial matters will enhance the smooth celebration of the mass.

The date for the release of the missal is still unknown. Over the next few months the work will pass from the International Commission on English in the Liturgy to the various English-language episcopal conferences, who will vote on it section by section. The Congregation for Divine Worship and the Discipline of the Sacraments will need to give its approval, which it prepares in consultation with another body, Vox Clara. Even Pope Benedict will need to be involved because the draft calls for changes to the formula of consecration. (“Take this, all of you, and eat of it, for this is my Body. . . .” “. . . The Blood of the new and eternal covenant; it will be poured out for you and for many. . . .”) The best guesses now put the publication date at 2010 or 2011.

The new translation will have a new style. It will put different words into the mouths of worshipers and ministers. The process of changing will be difficult for many. The hope is that it will be worth the effort. The missal will attempt to do better what no translation can do adequately: give us words to praise our God.

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