

## **The “New Missal” - One Year Later**

*Paul Turner*

One year after the introduction of the revised Roman Missal in English, people are still adjusting their mouths and ears to the new translation of the mass. The work still has its critics because the words of the mass mean much to every Catholic. On the extremes are those who think the entire book is a mistake and those who think it is a gem of beauty. In the middle are people who realize the revised translation has some hits and some misses. Deacons may find themselves personally in any one of these camps, but they all probably have had to dialogue with people asking plenty of questions.

As promised, the revised translation is closer to the Latin original. Examples abound, but deacons have experienced this in the greeting, where they utter or hear the response “And with your spirit.” They also hear a closer rendering of the priest’s words before a deacon proclaims the gospel. The priest now prays that the deacon may proclaim the gospel “worthily and well.”

There is also a closer translation for the deacon’s command at the end of the liturgy: “Bow down for the blessing.” The former translation, “Bow your heads and pray for God’s blessing,” was a free translation of the Latin, and actually indicated a different kind of bow than the rubrics ever intended. People are supposed to bow from the waist, not just the head. The revised translation, closer to the Latin original, makes the posture command more precise.

However, in other places, a freer translation of the Latin original survived. For example, the absolution that the priest gives during the penitential act was left unchanged, even though a closer translation would have gone like this: “May almighty God have mercy on us and lead us, with our sins forgiven, into eternal life.” The same is true of the conclusion to the gospel. The deacon or the priest still says, “The Gospel of the Lord,” even though the Latin has the same conclusion as for the previous readings: “The Word of the Lord.” Also unchanged is the second element of the preface dialogue, which means more literally something like this: “Let our hearts be lifted high. / We hold them before the Lord.” Although new words were suggested, the former translation held on.

Even the words of the deacon inviting the sign of peace were left alone. More literally, the Latin means, “Offer peace to one another.” It’s a command more than an exhortation, but the original English translation is intact.

These instances show a pastoral desire by those finalizing the words of the missal that the people’s parts not change as much as the priest’s did, and where a more literal translation did not bring about an improvement, the original was left alone.

Obviously, this thinking did not pervade other parts the missal. The creed, for example, changed the words “one in being” to “consubstantial,” a word that many still cannot pronounce or define. In this case, the theological content of the

**word, which declares that the Father and the Son are the same God, was thought to be more vital than an explanatory expression.**

**In some places, the translation prefers the Latin word order, even when it makes the English syntax hard to follow. One example is the conclusion to the eucharistic prayers: “Through him, and with him, and in him, / O God, almighty Father, / in the unity of the Holy Spirit, / all glory and honor is yours, / for ever and ever.” If the second line were moved to a position just before the last line, it would flow better, but the Latin word order, which mentions the Father before the Holy Spirit, was maintained.**

**Most of the freedoms in the former translation are still present in the revised. For example, the third form of the penitential act still comes with eight sample formulas, most of which are in Appendix VI. A deacon leading this form of the penitential act can still compose his own invocations, following these models. (Note that they are statements of praise to Christ who is merciful, not statements of sins the congregation has committed.)**

**The composition of the prayer of the faithful (the Universal Prayer) is still completely free, as long as one follows the description of its purpose in GIRM 70 and 71. The missal offers samples in Appendix V.**

**For the dismissal, the deacon or priest often improvised words based on those in the Sacramentary. Now, a variety of options appears in the Latin original of the missal, and these have been translated. Added in the year 2008, they are among the newest words to the history of the mass. Although some ministers still improvise, the revised formulas beautifully send the assembly out on mission together.**

**On the whole, the revised translation honors the work launched by the Second Vatican Council fifty years ago. When the council closed, Pope Paul VI established a committee to oversee the implementation of the council’s liturgical vision. That group established dozens of subcommittees of great liturgical scholars. Those working on the mass produced the first edition of the missal in 1969, which was revised a few years later, and then again in 2002. All this work was done in Latin.**

**The revised rules for translation came out about the same time as the missal’s third edition, which still contained virtually all the work of Pope Paul VI’s first edition. The revised translation reexamined the work of the council and presented it anew.**

**All this means that many different sources are responsible for the hits and misses of the revised translation. Do you have an opinion about the word “dewfall”? It was part of Eucharistic Prayer II ever since 1969 - in Latin. But the English translation did not carry the word until 2011. The word “consubstantial” is even older. The phrase “for you and for many” goes clear back to the gospels of Mark and Matthew. Decisions about word order and inclusive language fell to the various teams working on the translation. The International Commission on English in the Liturgy labored extensively on the project, and eleven conferences of bishops approved the results. The final revisions to the text - which were**

numerous - came from the offices of the Congregation for Divine Worship and the Discipline of the Sacraments in Rome. Consequently, when people have an opinion about a word or phrase in the missal, it may be difficult for them to know just who was responsible for it. In some cases, they may be disagreeing with Vatican II while trying to defend it.

The translation has faced an uphill struggle largely because many people felt that they were not consulted on a matter important to them - the words of their weekly celebration of the eucharist. Some of these words have been hard to pray for a variety of reasons ranging from the quality of the translation to one's feelings of disappointment. One year is a fairly short time in the life of the missal to know just how it will settle with the faithful who use it. Still, everyone seems to approach the book with the right reason: a longing to give proper thanks and praise to God.

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