

PREPARING FOR THE REVISED TRANSLATION OF THE MASS

A new English translation of the prayers and responses we use for the Mass will come into use in November 2011. Some parishes have already begun to use the new translation. **We plan to begin using the new translation here at St Mary's Concord in October.** Over the past weeks I have been writing short articles in the Parish Bulletin to help us to prepare for the new translation of the Missal.

Paul Crowley

THE PRAYERS OF THE MASS

In the early centuries there were no set prayers for the Mass. Over time various prayers were composed and gradually they were written down. In the western Church, they were in Latin, which at that time was the language of the western Roman empire. Later the prayers were collected into books that were called *Sacramentaries*. The *Sacramentary* is the book used by the presider and contains the prayers said by the priest, such as the *Opening Prayer*, the *Prayer over the Gifts* and the *Eucharistic Prayer*.

It is possible to trace back some of those prayers to the 5th Century. Pope Leo I (440-461) and Pope Gelasius (492-496) were both important composers of early prayers for the Church in Rome.

In the early centuries the readings used at Mass were read from a Bible but lists were kept to indicate which passage was to be read on a particular day.

The Missal, as we know it, emerged by the end of the 13th Century as a convenient way to bring the readings and the prayers of the Mass into one book. The popular *Sunday Missal* for the people with the prayers and readings in English only appeared in the middle of the 20th Century and it continued to include both the prayers and the readings.

The official *Roman Missal* is in fact made up of three books: the *Sacramentary* contains the various prayers used for the celebration of the Eucharist, the *Lectionary* contains the readings used at Mass and the *Book of the Gospels* contains the Gospel readings. The new translation affects the various prayers said by the priest, including the Eucharistic Prayers, and the prayers and responses of the assembly. The readings have not changed.

WHY A NEW TRANSLATION?

The official *Roman Missal* is always published in Latin and for many centuries the Mass in the Roman Rite of the Catholic Church was only celebrated in Latin. That does not mean that the Mass never

changed. Throughout the centuries many changes were made to the prayers and in western Europe there were several different Rites. Two of those continue today: the Ambrosian Rite in Milan (Italy) and the Mozarabic Rite in Toledo (Spain).

In the Roman Rite the texts of the Mass were fixed with the publication of the 1570 Missal. The Tridentine Mass, as it was called, remained for the next 400 years until the publication of the 1970 Roman Missal that followed the reforms called for by the Second Vatican Council in 1963.

Unofficial translations of the Latin prayers into modern languages had begun to appear in many countries during the 20th Century but in 1970 for the first time the Mass was able to be celebrated in the vernacular (the language of the local people).

The Bishops' Conferences in English speaking countries established the International Committee on English in the Liturgy (ICEL) to prepare the official English translation. We have been using that translation for the past 40 years.

In the 1990s ICEL began the task of revising the English translation. Their work was almost completed when the Vatican issued a decree calling for a more literal translation of the Latin prayers. Another translation was then prepared and that is the translation that is being introduced in 2011. As we will see, it has both strengths and weaknesses because of its very literal approach to the translation of the Latin text.

AND WITH YOUR SPIRIT

As noted last week, the Vatican issued a decree calling for a more literal translation of the Latin prayers and responses for the Mass.

One change that will become immediately obvious when we begin using the new translation is the response to the greeting: *The Lord be with you*. Our present response is: *And also with you*. The new translation is: *And with your spirit*.

The change has been made to give a more literal translation of the Latin: *Et cum spiritu tuo*, which has always been the response in the Latin text of the Missal. Those who are familiar with the Mass in other modern languages will notice that many follow the Latin, as for example in the Italian Missal where the response is *E con il tuo spiritu*.

But what does it mean? To answer that question we need to recall that the greetings we use in the Mass are saying something more than "Good morning".

It may be appropriate at a children's Mass for the priest to begin with the greeting "Good morning" but as adults we are conscious that when we gather to celebrate the Eucharist together we are doing more than just holding a meeting.

The traditional greetings we use in the liturgy are drawn from the Bible and have been used by Christian communities through the centuries. *The Lord be with you* is the greeting of the angel Gabriel to Mary in Luke 1:28 and it is also found in the Hebrew Scriptures (OT). The response: *And with your spirit* is based on the greeting found in four of the letters of St Paul where Paul uses it to greet the Christian community. In 2 Timothy 4:22 Paul concludes the letter: “The Lord be with your spirit. Grace be with you.”

It will take us time to become used to this change. Our present response may seem to be a more natural way of responding to the greeting of the priest. But the change does make us stop and think about the meaning of the liturgical greetings used in the Mass, such as *The Lord be with you*. It reminds us that we gather in the presence of the Risen Lord who is always with us.

PENITENTIAL ACT

A common element of the Introductory Rites of the Mass is the penitential act. It can be replaced with the Blessing and Sprinkling of Water to recall our Baptism or with other prayers in special celebrations such as a funeral or wedding.

In the Missal the penitential act has three forms and all three conclude with a general prayer said by the priest “May almighty God have mercy on us...”

This prayer is called an absolution but it is not to be confused with the sacramental absolution in the Rite of Reconciliation. That is why we do not sign ourselves with the sign of the cross as is done when the priest prays the absolution in the Sacrament of Penance.

The first option for the penitential act is the prayer “I confess...” which is sometimes referred to by its Latin title the *Confiteor*. The prayer has its origins in the prayers that were said by the priest in preparation for the Mass. It is now said by all the assembly and the new Missal gives a more literal translation of the Latin text.

It is a general confession of our sinfulness and reminds us that we come before God as people in need of God’s mercy and forgiveness.

There is also a new translation of the second form, although this form is not commonly used in parishes. It is a dialogue between the priest and the people based on biblical texts.

The third and most common form of the penitential act is based on a litany prayer form that includes the ancient chant “Lord have mercy, Christ have mercy.” The original *Kyrie, eleison* is in fact Greek and not Latin. The *Kyrie* was not originally a penitential prayer. It was not saying “Lord have

mercy on us” but rather it was a cry of homage and petition. It remains part of the litany, an ancient prayer of praise and petition.

The various verses (called tropes) are not statements about us and our sins. Therefore we do not say “For all the times I have sinned...Lord, have mercy.” Rather we focus on what God has done for us in Christ: “Lord Jesus, you are mighty God and prince of peace.” The different sets of tropes have been composed to reflect different seasons, such as Christmas and Easter.

When the third form is not used, the penitential act concludes with the saying or singing of the “Lord, have mercy”.

GLORY TO GOD

Last week we looked at the Penitential Act. Another common element of the Introductory Rites of the Mass is the *Gloria*. The name comes from the opening word in Latin text: *Gloria in excelsis Deo* (Glory to God in the highest). We sing or recite this ancient hymn on important feasts and on Sundays except during the seasons of Advent and Lent.

The hymn opens with the words of the angels in Luke’s account of the birth of Jesus but the *Gloria* is not found in the Bible. Its composer is not known. The most ancient surviving versions of a similar hymn are from Syria and from the *Apostolic Constitutions*, a Greek document from Antioch, dated about 400. The oldest Latin text known dates from 690.

The *Gloria* has three sections but it is not a hymn to the Trinity (Father, Son and Spirit). The first part takes up the words of Luke’s Gospel (2:14) following the Latin translation of Luke’s original Greek text: “Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace to people of good will.”

The second section gives praise to God. Here the new translation follows the Latin hymn more closely than does the present version and it clearly expresses the different ways we praise God: we praise you, we bless you, we adore you, we glorify you, we give you thanks.

The hymn then names God as heavenly King and Father before moving on to give praise to the Son. We would then normally have expected the hymn to complete the Trinity by referring to the Spirit, as do the ancient eastern versions of this hymn. The Latin text, however, shifts the focus to the Lamb of God. This title of Christ in John’s Gospel moves us to give praise to God for the redemption won for us by Jesus, the Lamb of God, who died for us and is now seated at the right hand of the Father.

The hymn then concludes with a doxology (giving praise) to Father, Son and Spirit.

THE PRESIDENTIAL PRAYERS

Last week we looked at the *Gloria*. The *Gloria* is followed by the Opening Prayer. This short prayer is said by the priest/presider. We use the term presider or president of the assembly because the ordained priest has the role of leading the community in prayer. The various prayers that are said by the priest are therefore called “presidential prayers” because he is praying them as leader of the gathered community.

As well as the Opening Prayer, they include the Prayer over the Gifts, the Prayer after Communion and the Eucharistic Prayer, the great prayer of thanksgiving.

The Eucharistic Prayer will be considered in more detail in a later article. The other prayers are part of what is called the Proper of the Mass. That means that they change according to the feast or the liturgical season, and therefore they are “proper” to a particular celebration.

The Opening Prayer is also called the Collect. When the priest says “Let us pray”, he is inviting us to pray for our own intentions as we gather to celebrate the Eucharist. The prayer that follows collects the prayers of the assembly and places them before God.

The Opening Prayer is usually addressed to God the Father although many different titles are used such as “Almighty God” or simply “O God”.

The prayer then names an attribute of God that reflects what God does for us before presenting our petition. The prayer concludes with a formula that recalls that we pray through our Lord Jesus Christ, in the unity of the Holy Spirit.

The translation of the Latin prayers in the 1970 Missal followed modern English style and used shorter sentences. The result was that some Latin words were not translated. The new translation is much more literal. While it does address some of the shortcomings of the earlier translation, the sentences are longer and more complex and therefore more difficult to follow.

THE CREED (Part 1)

On Sundays and important feasts (solemnities) the Profession of Faith, known as the Creed, is recited by the assembly after the readings and the homily.

Its purpose is to allow the gathered community to respond to the Word of God by recalling the great mysteries of our faith. There are two forms of the Creed approved for liturgical use: the Apostles’ Creed and the Nicene Creed. At other times, especially on Easter Sunday, the renewal of baptismal promises may replace the Creed.

The form we have most commonly used on Sundays is the Nicene Creed but the revised Missal notes that the Apostles’ Creed that is closer to the form of the baptismal promises may also be used, especially in Lent and the Easter season.

Both forms of the Creed have been retranslated and there are some significant changes in the Nicene Creed. The new translation is closer to the Latin text although it is also worth noting that when the Nicene Creed was first written it was composed in Greek and only later translated into Latin.

The Nicene Creed, as we know it, comes from an agreed statement of the Christian faith set down at the Council of the Church that took place at Chalcedon in 451. It affirmed earlier Creeds from the Councils of Constantinople (381) and Nicaea (325). One of the key concerns at that time was the relationship between the Father and the Son. The Nicene Creed had stressed the belief that the Son is the same Being (Greek: *homoousios*) as the Father. This was to counter the Arian heretics who said that the Son was lower than the Father.

This key Greek term is difficult to translate. Our current translation says that the Son is “begotten, not made, of one Being with the Father” meaning that the Son was not created but shares the same uncreated Being with the Father. The new translation has chosen a more literal translation of the Latin version “begotten, not made, consubstantial with the Father.”

THE CREED (Part 2)

One of the changes that will be very obvious is the beginning of the Nicene Creed. Our present translation begins “We believe” while the new translation follows the Latin (*Credo*) and begins in the first person singular “I believe.”

The original Greek version of the Nicene Creed began “We believe” to express the communal nature of the profession of faith. However, the Latin version changed to the singular “I believe” so that like the Apostles’ Creed, it more clearly expresses the personal dimension of faith. We gather as a community of believers but each person is called upon to make his or her own profession of faith.

When parents present a child for Baptism, they and the gathered community renew their own Baptism promises. Before adults are baptized in the name of the Trinity, they are asked to profess their faith in God: Father, Son and Spirit. By beginning with “I believe” both Creeds invite us to affirm our personal baptismal profession of faith.

Yet it also remains true that at Mass the Creed is a response from the whole community of believers to

the Word of God that has been proclaimed. The priest therefore should not immediately begin with the words “I believe” but should use an invitation such as “Let us together profess our faith” so that all in the assembly begin with the words “I believe”.

Now that it is an option, more parish communities will use the Apostles’ Creed because the language is less complex. However, one line is often confusing for people. In reflecting on the death of Christ it says “He descended into hell” (Latin: *descendit ad inferna*). But what does that mean?

Since this text of the Apostles’ Creed appeared in the 8th Century, there have been a number of different interpretations of *ad inferna*. What all have in common is that they understand *ad inferna* to mean “to the place of the dead” rather than the common notion of “Hell” as a place of eternal punishment.

THE LITURGY OF THE EUCHARIST

The Liturgy of the Word concludes with the Prayers of the Faithful. We then turn to the central part of our celebration, the Liturgy of the Eucharist.

Here the revised translation contains many very significant changes but they are found mostly in the prayers said by the priest as the leader of the prayer of the community. There are, however, some changes to the responses made by the people.

The Liturgy of the Eucharist begins with the procession of the gifts of bread and wine. After the gifts are placed on the altar, the priest invites the people to pray: *Pray, brothers and sisters, that my sacrifice and yours may be acceptable to God, the almighty Father.* The people reply: *May the Lord accept the sacrifice at your hands for the praise and glory of his name, for our good and the good of all his holy church.* In the people’s response the only change is the addition of “holy” in “the good of all his holy church”. Here again the change has been made to give a literal translation of the Latin text.

It is worth recalling that the revision of the prayers of the Mass in the 1970 Missal of Paul VI greatly simplified a complex series of prayers and ritual actions that used to be called the Offertory. The 1970 Missal uses a “blessing prayer” to accompany the simple action of placing the gifts on the altar in what is now called the Preparation of Gifts.

In the Middle Ages, the priest was facing the altar with his back to the people for the Offertory. At this point he turned and asked the people to pray (Latin: *Orate, fratres*) before turning again to face the altar to pray the Eucharistic Prayer (Roman Canon) silently. There were many different responses to the invitation. The one we use, *May the Lord accept...*,

was common in Italy in 11th Century and found its way into the Roman Missal. It reflects a very particular understanding of the role of the priest that was the product of the liturgical practice of the Middle Ages.

THE EUCHARISTIC PRAYER (Part 1)

After the Preparation of the Gifts, we begin the great prayer of thanksgiving, the Eucharistic Prayer. The prayer begins with a dialogue between the priest/presider and the assembly.

There are changes to the peoples’ responses: “And also with you” becomes “And with your spirit” as has been discussed previously. In the final exchange: “Let us give thanks to the Lord our God”, the response becomes: “It is right and just”.

As in other places, the change has been made to give a more literal translation of the Latin text: *Dignum et iustum est*. If the expression “right and just” sound juridical to our ears, it is because the early Christians took over Latin expressions from the pagan Roman culture with its strong emphasis on law. In that sense it reflects the ancient Roman view that human beings have a “legal” duty to offer worship to God.

Some commentators suggest that “right and just” are synonymous terms and so the translation that we have used for the past 40 years combined the two words in the response “It is right to give him (the Lord our God) thanks and praise”.

The first part of the Eucharistic Prayer that follows the dialogue is called the Preface and there are many different Prefaces in the Missal. The origin of the Latin term *praefatio* which is translated “preface” is obscure and it did not take on the meaning of “an introduction” until about 7th Century.

The Preface changes according to the liturgical season or the feast. The revised Missal has 50 Prefaces and there are others listed for special feasts. What they all have in common is the theme of giving thanks and praise to God for all that God has done for us in Christ.

The Preface leads us to the acclamation of praise to God: “Holy, Holy, Holy Lord” sometimes still known as “The Sanctus” from the Latin *sanctus* meaning holy. We will look more closely at the changes to the acclamation next week.

THE EUCHARISTIC PRAYER (Part 2)

The Preface leads us to the acclamation *Holy, holy, holy Lord* which is sometimes still known as the Sanctus (Latin meaning holy).

In the Missal there is a minor change in the new translation. Previously we began “Holy, holy, holy Lord, God of power and might” and now we begin “Holy, holy, holy Lord God of hosts.” Why the change?

Once again the change has been made to give a more literal translation of the Latin text *Sanctus Dominus Deus Sabaoth*. The Latin text does not translate the Hebrew “sabaoth” so what does the word mean?

The beginning of the hymn is based on a text from the Bible, the vision of the throne of God in Isaiah 6:1 where the angels shout to each other “Holy, holy, holy is God Sabaoth”. The Book of the Prophet Isaiah of course was written in Hebrew and some translations of the Bible leave the Hebrew word “sabaoth” while others (e.g.NRSV) have “The Lord of Hosts”. Therefore the new translation of the Mass has followed the NRSV biblical translation and so the Latin: *Deus Sabaoth* becomes “God of Hosts”.

Because we often sing the “Holy, holy” the musical settings have been changed to fit the different words.

Another acclamation in the Eucharistic Prayer is the Mystery of Faith. The Latin text has three acclamations while the previous English Missal has four acclamations. The most commonly used was “Christ has died, Christ is risen, Christ will come again.”

This was a free rendering of the three-fold idea expressed in all the acclamations that our faith is celebrating the past: Christ has died; the present: Christ is risen; and the future: Christ will come again. That particular acclamation has been dropped and now there are only three acclamations which give a more literal translation of the Latin texts. As we often sing the acclamation, here also the musical settings have changed to accommodate the new words.

THE MEANING OF EUCHARIST

In our western Catholic tradition the popular term “Mass” has been used for the Celebration of the Eucharist. The word “Mass” comes from the Latin form of the dismissal at the very end of the celebration: *Ite missa est* which means “Go, you are sent forth”. It reflects one aspect of the Eucharist and we will return to the dismissal at another time.

For the moment, we continue to explore the great prayer of praise and thanksgiving which we call the Eucharistic Prayer.

As we have previously seen the word *eucharist* is from a Greek word meaning “thanksgiving”. It is at the very centre of what we do: we give thanks to God for all that God has done for us, and in particular, for calling us to be one with Christ in his death and resurrection.

The second Eucharistic Prayer clearly expresses that central truth: “Therefore, as we celebrate the

memorial of his Death and Resurrection, we offer you, Lord, the Bread of Life and the Chalice of salvation, giving thanks that you have held us worthy to be in your presence and minister to you.”

We are giving thanks to God first and foremost because God has called us to be one with Christ. Our response to that call is “to remember” how the invitation has been given. We recall the death and resurrection of Christ as the central event of God’s saving plan. We use the word “memorial” which means more than just remembering a past event. Through the gift of the Spirit we become one with Christ in the “moment” of his death and resurrection. Christ died at a particular moment in history and we become one with him in his self-offering to the Father by sharing in the Celebration of the Eucharist. As our gifts of bread and wine become the Body and Blood of Christ through the outpouring of the Holy Spirit, so through the same Spirit, we become the one Body of Christ.

Thus our prayer of thanksgiving is directed to God the Father, through the Son, in the unity of the Holy Spirit.

THE COMMUNION RITE

The Communion Rite begins with the Lord’s Prayer. The prayer is found in Matthew’s Gospel (6:9-13). An examination of any modern English translation of the Gospel will show an alternative translation of Matthew’s Greek text. However, in this case the editors of the revised Missal have sensibly chosen not to change the traditional English version.

There are many prayers in the Communion Rite that are said quietly by the priest. They are examples of the private prayers that came into the Mass in the Middle Ages, when the priest was praying quietly at the altar with his back to the people.

After the “Breaking of the Bread” during which the chant *Lamb of God* is sung, the invitation to Communion has changed: “Behold the Lamb of God...Blessed are those called to the supper of the Lamb”. The words “Behold the Lamb of God” are a reference to Jesus that is found in John’s Gospel (1:29). The image of the “supper of the Lamb” comes from the Book of Revelation (19:9): Blessed are those who are invited to the marriage supper of the Lamb (NRSV).

The peoples’ response: “Lord, I am not worthy that you should enter under my roof..” is a reference to the scene where a Roman centurion asked Jesus to heal his servant (Mt 8:8 and Lk 7:6). In the Gospels the centurion was literally speaking of his house.

In the former translation we said “Lord I am not worthy to receive you.” It may not have been a

literal translation but it much better expressed the meaning of this prayer in the Mass. To claim that we need to use the literal image of a house roof to understand that this prayer is inspired by the Gospel scene gives little credit to the faithful who say this prayer.

The change from “I shall be healed” to “my soul shall be healed” is based on the literal translation of the Latin “anima”. It is argued that “soul” better expresses that the prayer is about spiritual healing. However, given the context of the prayer, very few people would have been confused by the former translation.

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