

## **What is the Roman Missal?**

The *Roman Missal* is the ritual book that contains all the prayers, chants, and instructions for the celebration of the Eucharist for the entire Roman Catholic Church. Other rites united to Rome use Greek, Syrian, and other languages; but in the Latin Rite Catholic church, the Missal is always issued in a Latin text called the *editio typica* (typical edition). For more than a thousand years, Latin has been the only liturgical language used in the Latin Rite Catholic church until the reforms of the Second Vatican Council.

In 1970, Pope Paul VI promulgated a new official Latin text of the reformed liturgy. Because the full, conscious, and active participation of the people of God was a primary goal of the Council fathers, they permitted the use of local languages, or vernacular, rather than Latin. This revised Latin text was quickly translated into various languages for use around the world. The official English translation was first used in the United States in 1973.

In 1975 a revised *editio typica* was promulgated by the Holy See, and English translators worked on it for many years. When their work was finally completed and approved by the bishops of the English-speaking countries, it was sent to Rome for *recognitio*, or official approval. This was never given. Finally, in 2000, Pope John Paul II promulgated a third Latin edition of the Roman Missal. Once again translators worked on this edition. In March of 2010, the United States Bishops Conference received word that the translation had approval. This new translation will begin to be used in the United States on the First Sunday of Advent this year. The series of articles to follow will explain the various parts of the Mass so that the People of God in the Archdiocese of Detroit will welcome this new Roman Missal with greater understanding.

## **Why is there a new Roman Missal?**

The liturgical reform of the Second Vatican Council permitted Mass in vernacular languages for the first time in hundreds of years. Pope Paul VI himself participated in developing the principles to be used in translating liturgical texts. In January 1969, the French document, *Comme le prévoit*, laid down the translation rules. These called for texts which had “dynamic equivalence” to the Latin original. This meant that newly-translated texts would mean the same thing as the Latin but would not be word-for-word the same.

Because *Comme le prévoit* allowed paraphrases of texts if they accurately communicated the original meaning, language experts had considerable freedom in deciding how best to translate the Latin original both in what it said and how it sounded. The Mass text American Catholics began to use in 1970 was translated according to these principles of “dynamic equivalency.” As a result, the words we have grown used to these last forty years are less literal and, in part, less formal and more conversational than the Latin original.

In the Jubilee Year 2000, the Vatican promulgated a third Latin *editio typica* of the Roman Missal. A year later, the Congregation for Divine Worship and the Discipline of the Sacraments published a new statement of translation principles called *Liturgiam authenticam*. This document requires

liturgical translators to find exact equivalents for the individual Latin words. New vernacular Mass texts must now reflect a meticulous “formal equivalence” with the original. The result for English speakers will be changes in some words and phrases we have used since the early 1970s. For example, the ritual dialogue between priest and people which occurs several times during the Mass says in Latin, “*Dominus vobiscum,*” “*Et cum spiritu tuo.*” This will now be: “The Lord be with you,” “And with your spirit.” This new translation has formal equivalence to the Latin original. Although we will all need to learn the new wording of the responses and prayers, we will gain some of the poetry and scriptural richness expressed in the original Latin.

### **The Value of the New Translation**

No one likes change, so it is important to explain the reason for the changes we will soon experience in praying the Mass together. These changes are grounded in a principle set down by Prosper of Aquitaine, a fifth century lay theologian. He wrote, “The law of prayer is the law of belief.” This unusual phrase means that the *prayer* of the Church is the *foundation of the Church’s doctrine*, an idea which is quite counter-intuitive for us. We generally think doctrine comes first and prayers are crafted to express the doctrine. In fact, our oldest prayers go the other way.

The communal prayer of the earliest Christians preceded all of the Church’s doctrine—but it contained truths which eventually became dogma. For example, the Trinitarian baptismal formula preceded the earliest creed. Prosper, who was born just nine years after the Nicene Creed was completed, recognized that this and many other Christian truths were to be found first in the Spirit-filled prayer of believers.

Our contemporary Church leaders, mindful that the words we use in our prayer shape what we believe, are very concerned that we accurately express our faith in the liturgy. They are calling everyone in the Latin Rite to return to our roots. The conversational and less-formal style of prayer we have used since 1973 has been very valuable in helping people hear and understand the prayers and take their proper role in the celebration of the Eucharist. However, to paraphrase the words of *The Interpretation of the Bible in the Church*, which provides a parallel case, “church authority, exercised as a service of the community, must see to it that [textual translation] remains faithful to the great tradition which has produced the texts” (p. 28). And so, on the First Sunday of Advent, 2011, the third edition of the Roman Missal will be the only translation of the Roman Missal to be used for the ordinary celebration of the Eucharist.