

The New Translation of the Holy Mass: The Fourth Sunday of Advent

by Brian W. MacMichael

We are already nearing the end of Advent, and as the number of penance services and special confession times offered in recent days reminds us, it is important to make good use of the remainder of this season to prepare ourselves spiritually for Christmas. We likewise continue our study and preparation for the new English translation of the Holy Mass, which we will begin using next Advent.

Over the last couple of weeks, we have been examining texts from the Order of Mass – the prayers that are constant from week to week. This week, as we did for the First Sunday of Advent, we will instead examine a prayer from the Proper of the Mass, which includes all the prayers that change depending on the liturgical day or season (such as the Proper of Saints).

The Opening Prayer of the Mass, traditionally called the Collect Prayer, would be considered part of the Proper. It is called the Collect because it "collects" all the people's prayers from the Introductory Rites of the Mass into a single prayer said by the priest. It also serves to express the character of the particular liturgical celebration.

Let us look at the current Collect for the Fourth Sunday of Advent (there are two that can be used, but this is the primary option given):

**Lord,
fill our hearts with your love,
and as you revealed to us by an angel
the coming of your Son as man,
so lead us through his suffering and death
to the glory of his Resurrection.**

We can see that the current translation is a descriptive, eloquent prayer that contains significant content about the Annunciation, the Incarnation, and the Paschal Mystery – all in just a few lines. However, there is something interesting about the new translation of this same prayer, which will look like this:

**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.**

Not only does the new translation carry an even more detailed version of the same rich content, but it also does so while preserving the beautiful wording of a traditional Catholic prayer that many readers may recognize: the Angelus. The Angelus is a devotional prayer, said at particular times during the day, which focuses on the salvific mystery of Our Lord's Incarnation through the lens of the Archangel Gabriel's appearance to the Blessed Virgin Mary at the Annunciation.

Many Catholics who are very familiar with the Angelus may never have realized, from our current translation, that this Collect is the same prayer said at the conclusion of the Angelus. And it truly is the exact same prayer, for the Latin texts of the Angelus and of this Collect are identical. How wonderful that the new translation will enable this connection to shine through more clearly, especially given the appropriateness of this prayer so close to Christmas!

This Collect also illustrates another point – that the recovery of traditional devotional language, such as the language of the Angelus, can be helpful for prayer. Many will recall how hand missals and prayer books decades ago all contained this sort of grand, formal style. This approach was largely abandoned around the time that the current Mass translation was completed, but has since seen a resurgence, perhaps precisely because there is a certain timelessness to this manner of speech.

We may consider the use of words like “thy” and “thou” as archaic and odd in conversational English, but they remain fervently prayed and easily memorized in the Our Father, Hail Mary, 10 Commandments, and even such hymns as the Notre Dame Alma Mater. There is a timeless appeal to the wording and content of these prayers. Similar things might also be said by Protestants about the King James Version of the Bible. Examples can even be found in the secular world: the Declaration of Independence, the National Anthem, or the Gettysburg Address. There is a universal sense that these important texts are properly preserved in a more majestic style of speech, to show that they are important and distinct from the commonplace.

May we seek this inspiring splendor in Christ and His sacred liturgy as we ready to welcome Him at Christmas!