

## **The New Translation of the Holy Mass: Final Reflections**

by Brian W. MacMichael

Over the last few months, we have studied the upcoming new English translation of the Roman Missal, which we shall begin using on the First Sunday of Advent – November 27, 2011.

Much still needs to be done as we ready ourselves for the implementation, and there will also surely be a little sadness as we bid farewell to the Mass translation we have become accustomed to over the last 40 years. However, despite some opposition and criticisms we may encounter, it is important to keep in mind that the process by which we have received the new Missal has been very methodical and comprehensive. There is never such a thing as a perfect translation, for each language has its own unique character. But many experts and Church leaders have worked diligently over the last decade to ensure we receive the most suitable and accurate translation of all the prayers as possible.

In a very real way, this new Missal should help foster the full, active, and conscious participation of the faithful – especially with respect to renewed interior participation at Mass. The rituals and actions of the Mass are not changing; rather, we are receiving richer translations of the original Latin words of the Mass. The new words will require priests and laity alike to be even more attentive to the deep meaning of the prayers.

As we have seen, the new translation will reveal the Scriptural origins of the Mass more powerfully. And although some of the prayers may be longer or more complex than those we use right now, they would not be terribly different in length or style from many sentences among the Pauline readings that we currently hear in the Lectionary.

The new texts also demonstrate the evolution of the Church's understanding of how to use the vernacular most effectively in prayer. In fact, many aspects are a recovery of the devotional language that is familiar from private prayer books. It is an effort to cultivate a "sacred vernacular" – an elevated style of speech that illustrates the significance of the occasion, and helps us enter a context of divine worship. As Pope Paul VI urged in 1969, the language used in the sacred liturgy "should always be worthy of the noble realities it signifies, set apart from the everyday speech of the street and the marketplace."

Our sacred music at Mass should also reflect this principle. We will sing new settings of the revised Gloria and Sanctus, but all music at Mass should exude a clearly sacred style, for our singing in praise of the Lord is a sacramentalizing of human speech. This is wonderfully evident in liturgical chant, which evokes the heavenly choirs in a simple yet noble fashion.

These elements of the new translation are integral to prayer and worship in the Roman Rite, which in turn are key to our identity as Roman Catholics. It is this need to maintain a distinctive Catholic identity that makes the new Missal so important. Through it, we will achieve greater unity with Mass translations in other languages. But perhaps more

significantly, our new translation of the Mass will help us to set ourselves apart from the culture at large.

It will require us to exercise patience and discipline as we engage the new texts for the first time. It will necessitate deeper study of the faith by presenting the splendor of truth with greater precision. Even if there are difficult words or prayers, their meanings can be taught – and the opportunity to catechize on the depth and mystery found in the words of the Mass can have great evangelizing potential.

What better way to advance the New Evangelization than through the Holy Mass itself? The sacred liturgy is meant to transform and mold us, not vice versa! If we are uneasy with the Church's prayer, perhaps we should strive to understand and enter more fully into that life of prayer.

Particularly as young people today find themselves having to combat radical secularism at every turn, it is of tremendous benefit to worship in a manner that is meant to radiate reverence, truth, and beauty unambiguously and abundantly. A renewed expression of the immensity of what happens at the sacred liturgy is essential – this will inspire more seekers of truth to recognize their home in Christ's Church. And ultimately, I believe such beauty in the Mass will lead to an increase in vocations to the holy priesthood. We should therefore approach the new translation with joy, supporting our priests wholeheartedly as they strive to implement the texts.

We began our reflection in Advent, a season of preparation. So it is appropriate that we conclude at the beginning of Lent, another time of heightened preparation and prayer. May we use this season, and all the days until the implementation of the new Missal, to prepare ourselves for a fruitful encounter with the divine Word of God, Jesus Christ, in the words of every Mass. As the new Collect Prayer for Mass on the First Sunday of Lent will say in 2012, may we “grow in understanding of the riches hidden in Christ and by worthy conduct pursue their effects.”