

The New Translation of the Holy Mass: The Gloria

by Brian W. MacMichael

Contrary to the secular holiday calendar that advertises Christmas throughout the fall before promptly switching to Valentine's Day décor after the New Year, the liturgical season of Christmas begins with the Nativity and lasts until the Feast of the Baptism of the Lord (January 9 this year). Within this season is also the Solemnity of the Epiphany, when we commemorate the coming of the Magi (who represent the Gentiles) to visit the Child Jesus. All of these events – the Nativity, the Epiphany, and the Baptism of the Lord – involve God revealing or manifesting Himself to the world and mankind.

In a sense, we can prepare for the new English translation of the Roman Missal as a gift that provides a fuller manifestation of truth and beauty, such that we may recognize and encounter the Divine more readily in the prayers of the sacred liturgy.

This week, we continue our study of the Order of Mass by examining parts of the Gloria, which the *General Instruction of the Roman Missal* describes as “a very ancient and venerable hymn in which the Church, gathered together in the Holy Spirit, glorifies and entreats God the Father and the Lamb.” The Gloria dates back to the early Church, and should be sung on all Sundays outside Advent and Lent, as well as on feasts, solemnities, and certain special celebrations.

The following is the full text of the newly-translated Gloria:

**Glory to God in the highest,
and on earth peace to people of good will.**

**We praise you,
we bless you,
we adore you,
we glorify you,
we give you thanks for your great glory,
Lord God, heavenly King,
O God, almighty Father.**

**Lord Jesus Christ, Only Begotten Son,
Lord God, Lamb of God, Son of the Father,
you take away the sins of the world, have mercy on us;
you take away the sins of the world, receive our prayer;
you are seated at the right hand of the Father, have mercy on us.**

**For you alone are the Holy One,
you alone are the Lord,
you alone are the Most High,
Jesus Christ,
with the Holy Spirit,
in the glory of God the Father. Amen.**

Much of the text of the Gloria comes from Scripture: we previously noted how the first lines are derived from the angels heralding the glad tidings of Christ's birth in Luke 2:14 - "Glory to God in the highest and on earth peace to those on whom His favor rests." The opening words of "Glory to God in the highest" also correspond to the Latin, "*Gloria in excelsis Deo*" (a phrase universally familiar from the popular Christmas carol, "Angels We Have Heard on High").

There are clearly substantial differences between this new text and the Gloria translation that we have been using. The current text reads, "peace to His people on earth," which the new liturgical text expands to "on earth peace to people of good will." It helps to know that certain translations of the Bible render Luke 2:14 as "...on earth peace, good will toward men" or "...peace among those in whom He is well pleased." The new translation of the Gloria is a richer reference to the fact that the Messiah's coming brings the world a higher order of divine peace that only the incarnate Son of God can bestow. Those who live in accordance with God's will and receive His grace shall experience the fullness of this peace.

Turning to the second sentence of the new Gloria, we notice something striking – the new translation recovers entire phrases that were left out of the current translation. Right now, we sing, "we worship you, we give you thanks, we praise you for your glory." However, the Latin text of the hymn offers five successive ways in which we should pay homage to God: "We praise you, we bless you, we adore you, we glorify you, we give you thanks for your great glory." In a general sense, it is true that these all convey the same idea of worshiping God. But liturgical prayer is enhanced by poetic repetition, and these five descriptions of worship do hold distinct connotations if examined closely. Together, they combine to express the extent to which it is our Christian duty to give "glory to God."

Next time, we shall examine the second half of the Gloria, as well as some implications that the new text carries for sacred music.

Gloria text reproduced with permission of the International Commission on English in the Liturgy.