

What Is the Roman Missal?

Over the past several years, you have heard much through newspapers, blog postings, and Twitter about the forthcoming revised translation of the Roman Missal. You may be wondering, “What is the Roman Missal, and how does this translation affect us?”

Take notice of the red book the priest uses most often during Mass. This book is called the *Sacramentary*, which together with the *Lectionary for Mass* make up the *Roman Missal*. The missal is the collection of prayers, chants, and instructions (rubrics) used to celebrate Mass. This includes prayers such as the Sign of the Cross and opening greeting; Opening Prayers; Gloria; Creed; Eucharistic Prayers; Holy, Holy, Holy; Memorial Acclamations; and the final blessing. The majority of the prayers we recite or sing at Mass are contained in this book and it is these prayers that are currently being retranslated from the original Latin into English.

In the early Christian Church, many of the Mass prayers were memorized and handed down orally. Scribes eventually collected the prayers and recorded them in *liber sacramentum* (book of sacraments or sacramentaries). Other books were used for the scripture readings: Lectionaries and a Book of the Gospels (Evangelary) for the scripture readings, and additional books for the chants and antiphons. Slight changes and additions developed as manuscripts were handed on and hand scribed. Eventually the chants, scripture readings, prayer texts, and instructions were compiled into a single volume, the *Missale Plenum* (complete missal). When Johannes Gutenberg invented the movable printing press in 1470, this allowed the Mass texts to become standardized and published universally. In 1474, the first *Missale Romanum* (*Roman Missal*) was printed in Latin and the texts contained in this volume evolved over the five ensuing centuries.

Because the amount of scripture proclaimed at Mass increased following the Second Vatican Council (1962–1965), the *Missale Romanum* (*Roman Missal*) was divided into two separate books: The *Lectionary for Mass* (four volumes of Sacred Scripture) and the *Sacramentary* (prayers, chants, and instructions [rubrics] for the celebration of the Mass). The Lectionary texts for the dioceses of the United States were



revised in 1998 and are currently used in the liturgy. The texts that are found in the current *Sacramentary* have been retranslated and will eventually be used in English-speaking countries. With this translation, the name of the book will change from *Sacramentary* to *Roman Missal*, a translation of the Latin title, *Missale Romanum*.

All of the prayers we say in English have corresponding Latin texts. After the Second Vatican Council, the Latin texts were translated into the vernacular, or common language, of particular regions. The first English translation of the *Roman Missal* was completed quickly in 1969. It aimed for a “spirit” of the texts rather than an exact literal translation of the Latin words.

A second revision of these texts occurred in 1975. In 2001, the Congregation for Divine Worship and the Discipline of the Sacraments, the liturgical commission in Rome, issued a document outlining the methodology and process for translating liturgical texts into vernacular languages. This document, *Liturgiam Authenticam*, called for a more literal translation of the original Latin, and so a group of scholars, poets, and theologians convened and worked painstakingly on providing a third English translation. The Congregation for Divine Worship and the Discipline of the Sacraments announced *recognitio* on April 30, 2010. It is most likely that these texts will be implemented on November 27, 2011, the First Sunday of Advent.

When the translation is used, you will notice slight changes in the prayers we hear and say at Mass. For example, we will soon respond, “And with your spirit” to “The Lord be with you.” Being faithful to the original Latin prayers will enhance the meaning of the texts. They will be more poetic, and there will be a more obvious connection to the scriptural roots of our prayers. There is an old axiom, *lex orandi, lex credendi*—that is “the law of prayer is the law of faith” or “that which we pray is that which we believe.” This is why the prayers of the Church are so important and why the Church has initiated the process of revising the English translation. The words of our prayers are what we believe as a Church and form us as the body of Christ. For more information about the *Roman Missal*, please visit this Web site: www.RevisedRomanMissal.org.

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