

Welcoming the New *Roman Missal*



Translating the *Roman Missal*

For more than 2,000 years, the Church has paid careful attention to how our prayer is composed and recorded. After all, the words of our prayer express the words of our belief – words matter.

The *Roman Missal* is the book that contains the words used at our Mass. In 1969, Pope Paul VI promulgated the *first* edition of the *Roman Missal* after Vatican II. A slightly revised *second* edition appeared in 1975. In 2000, Pope John Paul II promulgated the *third* edition. (Not a lot changed, but there were new texts for the many saints whom he had canonized.) As usual, this liturgical book was released in Latin and then conferences of bishops all over the world began to translate it into various languages.

Who does the actual translating from Latin to English? In 1963, the bishops of the U.S. joined 10 other English-speaking countries and formed a group of linguistic scholars called the International Commission on English in the Liturgy (ICEL). They prepared translations for the *Missal*, the *Liturgy of the Hours*, and all our sacramental rites. Their work was guided by a document entitled *Comme le Prevoit* (issued by the Consilium and Congregation for Divine Worship, 1-25-69). This guideline permitted translators to use “dynamic equivalence” – not word-for-word translation, but phrasing that better suited the cadence of each vernacular language.

ICEL never ceased to work on the missals and other liturgical texts. But when the *third* edition of the *Roman Missal* was released, it was quickly followed by a new set of guidelines for the translators – *Liturgiam Authenticam: On the Use of Vernacular Languages in the Publication of the Books of the Roman Liturgy*. This guideline required a more literal translation. Some key points in *Liturgiam Authenticam* are worth noting:

- Scriptural allusions should foster a correspondence between biblical and liturgical texts
- Appreciating a word chosen by the early Church Fathers in the context of their debates

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- Appreciating “sacral language,” that is, we don’t address God in everyday speech
- Using a consistent manner of rendering an expression throughout the text
- Carefully ordering words, subordinate and relative clauses, and preserving parallelism
- Translation of terms as in the original – same person, number and gender
- Using a rich variety of theological vocabulary, especially in titles addressing God
- The phrase “Son of Man” is to be rendered faithfully and exactly throughout the text
- Using a masculine pronoun for the Holy Spirit; a feminine pronoun for the Church
- Certain expressions in the Church’s patrimony are to be respected, for example, *et cum spiritu tuo* and *mea culpa, mea culpa, mea maxima culpa*
- Exclude any prejudice or unjust discrimination
- Respect literary and rhetorical genres – speeches, poetry, narratives, etc.

Guided by these stronger norms, the conferences and ICEL divided the new *Roman Missal* into 13 manageable sections – the Order of Mass, Proper of Seasons, Proper of Saints, etc. From February 2004 to November 2009, ICEL submitted each translated section to the bishops. At each stage, words were debated and refined, amendments made, and drafts went back and forth.

Finally, the United States Conference of Bishops (USCCB) approved each section and sent the text to the Holy See for a *recognitio* or final approval.

Meanwhile, other countries around the world were submitting their texts to Rome in English, French and German. Still other language groups continue to translate texts.

The USCCB received the first *recognitio* for the Order of Mass in June 2008, then the 12 remaining sections received a *recognitio* on March 25, 2010. Now the painstaking task of making sure every line is perfect is underway – all punctuation, capitalization and word order. Soon, the texts will be sent to publishers who will create worthy books for our use at Mass.

It takes a long time to do such holy work. Words matter. The words of prayer matter even more.

– Rita A. Thiron, director of the Office of Worship for the Diocese of Lansing.