

Pastor's Corner - November 6, 2011 - Biblical and Latin foundation of changes in the liturgy

Two weeks ago I wrote in this corner on the Vatican II foundation of the upcoming liturgical changes which will come into effect on the First Sunday of Advent on November 26 (copies in the foyer).

We need to remember that the reason for the new translation and the revised texts of the Roman Missal lies in the concern that Rome had shortly after Vatican II of coming up with texts which faithfully reflected the original Latin. It was generally accepted that the Sacramentary which was composed in 1973 did not translate precisely the Latin texts of the revised Liturgy because the concern at the time was to reflect more the meaning of the texts. The more dynamic translation of 1973 allowed for more freedom with the structure and content of the Latin sentences even if it lost some of the nuances of the original Latin. In the 1990's Pope John Paul II in his wisdom asked for a new Sacramentary based on the Latin texts. The name was changed to The Roman Missal and the third edition in Latin was approved in 2002.

It is the approved English edition of this Latin Roman Missal which we are now going to use. The result of these revised texts is a more literal and precise translation of the original Latin with all the nuances that a language such as Latin can give. This also means that a more formal style is used. Unfortunately, it also means that you will hear in the various Prayers, especially in the Eucharistic prayers that the priest prays in the name of the congregation, long drawn out sentences. However, it does not mean that we are returning to the pre-Vatican II Mass in Latin which dates from 1962. The vernacular English is supposed to have been enriched because the nuances of the original Latin texts are now being reintroduced in the new Roman Missal. English is not considered to be a precise language. Other languages, and Latin is among them, are richer and have a broader range of words for the same English word. Latin, for example, uses a number of different words for the word "love", or the word "mercy". The new translation takes these various Latin meanings and translates them into different English words, so that we will not hear, say or sing the repetition of the same English word.

Another aspect of this faithfulness to the Latin is that it is supposed to better connect the Missal to the Biblical Readings in the revised Lectionary which we have been using for the last two years. Many prayers in the Mass use the traditional words and expressions which we hear when the Word of God is proclaimed in our midst in the readings. We must also remember that the texts and prayers that have come down to us from the long Hebrew, Greek and Latin tradition were often poems and songs. This means that the meaning and sentiment were expressed in a broad range of vocabulary with many different rhythms and in a variety of structures. Paul Turner expresses this in his little booklet "*Understanding the Revised Mass Texts*,": "Just as many Catholic church buildings were adorned with stained glass and other great works of art to please the eye, so the words of worship were shaped to please lips and the ear. The beauty of the language proclaimed the beauty of God."

An example of this richer language comes in the greeting and response which is present in the mass on several occasions. "The Lord be with you" comes from the Bible in Judges 6:12; Ruth 2:4; Luke 1:28 as well as in the promise of Christ that he will be with us wherever we go. Our English "good-bye" really comes from "God be with you." The new response "And with your Spirit" which translates the Latin "Et cum spiritu tuo" has always been used in most other languages, such as French, German, Spanish, Italian. This response is inspired by passages in the New Testament letters (2 Timothy 4:22; Galatians 6:18, Philippians 4:23, Philemon 25), where it is addressed not to an individual minister but to the whole Christian community. The greeting really expresses the hope that the Lord be present to the spirit of the entire community. In other words, both the priest/presider and the community are closely interrelated and united in the one celebration.

Shalom,

fr. Rolf, OP