

Pastoral Letter on the Revised Roman Missal and its Liturgical Norms
by the President of the Canadian Conference of Catholic Bishops
Bulletin 3

Are there many changes?

Many Catholics will not notice much difference from the former liturgical norms or earlier translations of the Roman Missal. After all, the Mass always remains basically the same, no matter the rite, language or translation. Like the disciples on the way to Emmaus (Luke 24.13-35), through the Eucharist we “*discover that Christ, risen from the dead, is our contemporary in the mystery of the Church, his body*” (Pope Benedict XVI, Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation *Sacramentum Caritatis*, 97). For this reason, we come together, glorifying God and confessing our unworthiness. We listen to the Word of God. We pray for all in need. We prepare the gifts of bread and wine which will become the Body and Blood of Our Lord Jesus Christ, so we can partake in his living Sacrifice. In the Eucharistic Prayer, we recall his death and resurrection, and pray that the Holy Spirit make us one in the Lord. We pray to Our Father in the words the Lord gave us. We deepen our faith, hope and love through communion with him and one another. We are sent forth again on God’s mission, blessed, encouraged and strengthened by the life-giving Trinity.

Nevertheless, the revised liturgical norms for all of Canada do involve some changes. These are intended to assist the community of faith as it continues to dialogue with the contemporary world, while also making more evident for our day the Church’s continuity in all times and places. Many Canadian congregations will experience a change as to when they stand and kneel during the Eucharistic Prayer. Obviously, we must accommodate the physical needs of individuals in the congregation, whether because of age, illness or other circumstances. At the same time, we want to encourage a harmonious, orderly and reverent response to the words of the Eucharistic Prayer. Furthermore, the principles governing the revised norms remind us it is important for all liturgical texts as much as possible to use terms and images from the Sacred Scriptures. As well, translations of the Roman Missal are to reflect the meaning and vocabulary of its original Latin text. Roman Catholics, as distinct from Eastern Catholics, follow the liturgical tradition of the Roman or Latin Church, which has as its centre the Church of Rome. In other words, the “Latin” tradition is the common heritage of Roman Catholics.

Other than the few changes that may be noticed in the revised liturgical norms, and the enriched liturgical vocabulary which may especially strike English-speaking Catholics, the revised translation of the Roman Missal into English will include some other modifications:

1. In the dialogue involving the celebrant and the community, a few responses have been slightly altered, such as “And with your spirit” (instead of “And also with you”). This way our English-language usage will be more in keeping with the phrasing used in most other languages, while also explicitly reminding us that the spiritual dynamic is fundamental to our prayer and worship.
2. The wording of the ancient hymn *Glory to God in the highest* will now be closer to the original versions in both Greek and Latin, dating back at least to the 4th century, while the language of what is now called the Nicene Creed when used in the Liturgy will become closer to the original Greek, from the 4th and 5th centuries, as well as to the historic Latin and English translations.
3. At the same time that the choice of words used in the Liturgy will more effectively reflect the vocabulary from Scripture and our Latin tradition, there is also an effort to retain whenever possible elements traditional among all English-speaking Christians. These will be evident in the choice of some wording, and at times in how the prayers are constructed or phrased. Examples include the continued use of the traditional translation of the Our Father, and a return to the use of the word “consubstantial” in the Nicene Creed – a word dating back to William Caxton in 1483, who is credited with printing the first Bible in English. This common heritage reflects not only what Catholics have received from other Christians since the Reformation, but also what Catholics have contributed since the first Anglo-Saxon translations in the 7th and 8th centuries.

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Catholic identity and unity

All the changes in the revised liturgical norms and in the new English translation of the Roman Missal are to encourage a deeper sense of our unity in the Lord and as a community. Catholics live and worship in union with the Holy Father and our Bishops. Our identity requires us to be in living continuity with the traditions of the Sacred Scriptures and the early Church. Our communion unites all who are members of the Roman and Eastern Catholic Churches. But the members of the Roman Catholic Church also share and participate in a specific form of worship which is basically the same for all the Catholic Church of the West. “Roman Catholics” follow the liturgical rite and disciplinary practices of the Church of Rome. In addition, English-speaking and French-speaking Roman Catholics each have their own long and rich heritages, which include a vocabulary developed over the centuries with other Christians.

Being in unity with the Pope and our Bishops, and in communion with the Church throughout the world and in all ages, is reflected in the harmony and order of the worshipping community. “*God is a God not of disorder, but of peace*” (1 Corinthians 14.33). A practical application of this is that the edition published by the Canadian Conference of Catholic Bishops will be the only new English translation of the Roman Missal approved by the Holy See and the Bishops of Canada for use in our country. A similar requirement will be in place for the revision of the French version of the Missal approved for Canada when it is later published.

Encouraging active participation in the Liturgy

The Second Vatican Council, in its Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy, *Sacrosanctum Concilium*, reminds us that in celebrating the Liturgy on earth, “*we take part in a foretaste of that heavenly Liturgy which is celebrated in the holy city of Jerusalem toward which we journey as pilgrims*” (no. 8). Particularly in the years since the Council, this pilgrimage involves continuing efforts to restore and promote the sacred Liturgy, so “*that all the faithful should be led to that full, conscious, and active participation in liturgical celebrations which is demanded by the very nature of the Liturgy*” (no. 14). These most recent changes thus become an invitation to each of us to deepen our understanding of and appreciation for the Liturgy, in which we are to be actively involved – body, heart and mind (no. 19).

For this reason, the Bishops of Canada have already made available a number of special resources for implementing the liturgical norms of the revised Roman Missal and its English translation for use in our country. Other new resources are also being developed, in both official languages. As well as the printed materials being provided by individual dioceses and by the Canadian Conference of Catholic Bishops, our Conference now provides a special English-language website, www.romanmissal.ca. Over the past three years, the English Sector Commission for Liturgy and the Sacraments, assisted by the National Liturgy Office, has been working in preparation with pastors, liturgists and pastoral assistants across the country. Later this year, our French Sector Commission for Liturgy and the Sacraments, with the *Office national de liturgie*, will be releasing materials to help dioceses and parishes implement the liturgical norms of the revised General Instruction in French. The whole Church wishes to profit from this particular catechetical moment, so all the People of God are “*imbued with the spirit and power of the Liturgy*” (*Sacrosanctum Concilium*, 14).

However helpful these resources from our Conference and others that will be available regionally or locally, it will be most important for all the faithful in each diocese to collaborate closely with their own Bishop. Priests, deacons, members of religious institutes as well as societies of apostolic life and the laity are to follow their Bishop’s specific diocesan directives for implementing the revised edition of the Roman Missal and its liturgical norms. As the Second Vatican Council reminds us, “*Liturgical services are not private functions, but are celebrations of the Church, which is the ‘sacrament of unity,’ namely, the holy people united and ordered under their Bishops*” (*Sacrosanctum Concilium*, 26).