

27th Sunday A October 2, 2011 Respect Life Sunday

Eight weeks from today, Catholic Mass will change suddenly and dramatically—the biggest change in forty years. It is time to say something about this so that we can all be prepared. (Besides that, I could not think of a thing to say about today's readings!) Simply put, here is what's happening: almost all the prayers of the Mass—both of the priest and your parts—have been retranslated from the Latin. Both you and I will have to learn our words all over again. You will have participation cards; the priest will have a new book, now to be called the Roman Missal.

How did we get here? Let's briefly visit the Last Supper, where Jesus is praying the first Mass. He obviously is not following a Missal, and he is speaking Aramaic, certainly not English. As the Church spread, the Mass began to be prayed in Greek, which was the language of most of the people. And for maybe two hundred years, the priest would make up his own prayers, usually following a pattern. Maybe by 300 AD, the Mass prayers began to be written down, which was of course very hard, since there were no printing presses. By perhaps 600 AD, everybody was speaking Latin, so the prayers were all translated into Latin. Pretty much the same Mass everywhere, but lots of variations.

Things change in 1517, when Martin Luther begins what we call the Protestant Reformation. To respond to that crisis, the Church calls the Council of Trent to try to clarify Catholic teaching, including how to pray the Mass. By now, the printing press has been invented, and finally, in 1570, the Church publishes the first Roman Missal. *Here's a copy of it.*

Things being in crisis, the Church does not publish the Roman Missal in the new languages of the people, but keeps it in Latin, which no one spoke. The Roman Missal was used in almost every Mass around the world from 1570 until 1970! I grew up with it. Being a server was a challenge back then!

In 1959, Pope John XXIII called the Second Vatican Council to renew the Church—and to reform the liturgy. The Mass was simplified, cleaned up; new prayers were written. In 1970, the Sacramentary, as it was called, was published (it was edited a bit in 1975); it's what we are using at today's Mass.

But there was a problem: the English translation of the 1970 Missal was more like a paraphrase. It was warm and user-friendly, but pretty inaccurate. For example, the Opening Prayer of the Mass in the Latin usually began, "Deus"="God." But in the 1970 Sacramentary, the prayers begin "God, our Father."

Pope John Paul II became pope in 1978; he knew Latin perfectly and English and many other languages well. And John Paul noticed that the new English translation was pretty loose. Finally, in 2002 the Vatican published a document which demanded that Mass translations be "authentic"—that is to say, more literal. Pope Benedict agreed with John Paul that the English translation left a lot to be desired.

Nine years later, here we are: on November 27, the first Sunday of Advent, the Mass will sound very different indeed. The big change might help us

attend Mass more prayerfully, might help us to appreciate the Eucharist more, might help us get closer to God-- if we attend Mass regularly, if we try to participate and make the prayers our own, and if we have a meaningful relationship with God who comes to us in Christ. More on some of those issues in the next few weeks.

For now, if I can just lift this 1570 Roman Missal...