

Roman Missal, Third Edition Background Information

In the Jubilee Year 2000, Pope John Paul II issued the 3rd edition of the Roman Missal (the book containing the ritual texts for the celebration of the Mass) in Latin. With this new Latin edition comes the task of translating it into English and because of this some of our responses will change. This change is not only happening in the United States. All English speaking countries, and indeed all other countries, are working on a new translation of these texts.

Shortly after the 3rd edition of the Roman Missal was issued, the principles for translation were revised. This is why much of what we hear and say will sound different. The principle used to translate the 2nd edition of the Roman Missal (the one currently in use) is called *dynamic equivalence*. *Dynamic equivalence* means to translate basic thoughts rather than individual words. Those who use this principle say that they are aiming for a transfer of the same meaning from the original to the receptor language. The original words and form are important only as a vehicle for the meaning; therefore, it is the meaning alone that is truly important in the translation. The principle used to translate the upcoming 3rd edition is called *formal equivalence*. *Formal equivalence* means to render the translation literally – almost word for word. It is allowable to change the arrangement and style of the words, but the original text must be translated integrally without changes in terms of content.

Since Vatican II, there have been over 50 documents issued in the form of statements, instructions, guidelines and laws regarding the translation of liturgical texts. This process has been an ongoing development for decades that has involved consultation with linguistic and liturgical scholars. It is natural to question the changes that we will experience in worship. Some may wonder if this is just change for the sake of change. However, the art of translating liturgical texts is something that the Church has been working on for over 40 years, ever since the *vernacular* (the primary language of a particular people) has been allowed.

Bishop Arthur Serratelli, in a 2008 speech to the Federation of Diocesan Liturgical Commissions, sums up the importance of this endeavor:

Liturgical language is important for the life of the Church. *Lex orandi, lex credendi*. In liturgy, the words addressed to God and the words spoken to the people voice the Faith of the Church. They are not simply the expressions of one individual in one particular place at one time in history. The words used in liturgy also pass on the faith of the Church from one generation to the next. For this reason, the bishops take seriously their responsibility to provide for the faithful the translations of liturgical texts that are accurate and inspiring.

This reminds us that liturgy is formative. This formation happens throughout our whole lifetime. What we pray helps to form what we believe (*Lex orandi, lex credendi*). The Church, in its liturgy, expresses our gratefulness to God with one voice.

To review the text changes, and to study further the reasons for these changes, you can visit the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops' website: <http://www.usccb.org/romanmissal>.