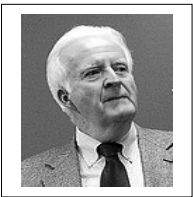


THE NEW TRANSLATION OF PRAYERS
AT MASS (THE ROMAN MISSAL) *By Francis J. Greene, Ph.D*

It is now some months since the new translations of prayers at Mass were introduced, not a bad time to look back and to reflect on the changes and their impact – at least here at Saint Francis Xavier Parish. Most parishioners seem to have settled in as regards the newly translated texts. A few have said that they find the changes unsettling after many years of wording that had become familiar and comfortable. This writer has noticed that more parishioners seem to be responding and participating in the prayers at Mass at St. Francis, perhaps because we are all using the prayer cards – not a bad result of the changes. Of course, it must be remembered that only a very small portion of the prayers said at Mass have been retranslated; the bulk of the liturgical prayers remain unchanged, especially the parts said by the congregation.



centurion spoke these beautiful words. This is an instance where the scriptural basis of the liturgy had been totally sacrificed to a pleasant sounding translation.

A close study of the liturgical texts for Mass, both the prayers spoken by the congregation and the those said by the priest, reveals that they are based to an extraordinary degree on texts taken directly from scripture. It has to be said that some of this was lost in the former translations and has now been restored.

A priest of the Diocese of Brooklyn recently said that, only when he had to read very carefully the new prayers of the Mass, did he realize how much he had been saying the prayers somewhat by rote and without sufficient reflection on what the words meant. In his view the translations had slowed him down a bit and, in his words, had woken him up, to pray more slowly and meaningfully. He then added that, perhaps, the Church should review the texts every forty years or so, just to shake us all out of our slumber. He was only half joking.

To follow up on Father’s observations we need to remember that any living organism changes. When there is no change at all, death has set in. So too with organizations and communities, including the Church. Of course Church doctrine on fundamental beliefs can never change because they are truths, and truth is truth; it does not change. Thus the Church’s proclamation of the Good News of salvation through Jesus Christ, of Eternal Life, of Christ’s Divinity, the Trinity, Christ’s resurrection can never and will never change. But our forms of prayer and worship and prayer can change and have consistently since the beginning of the Church. These recent adjustments are, when all is said and done, rather minor, yet they were considered important by Church leaders.

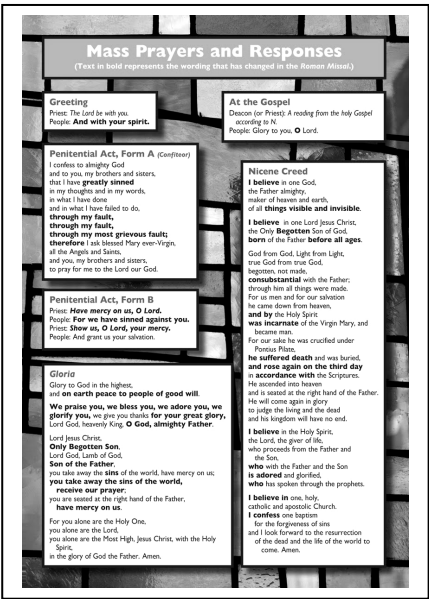
Why so important? The impetus to review and revise the translations has been based upon and animated by an ancient principle upheld in the Church: LEX ORANDI, LEX CREDENDI. Simply translated, this ancient Latin motto means: “As we pray, so we believe.” The words we mouth, even by rote, eventually become exactly what we believe (and inform what we do not believe). Thus, the importance that our Mass prayers be rooted in their original scriptural richness. Also important is that the subtle, theological bases of our prayers and beliefs not be lost. Thus, in the Creed, we now say of Christ “Consubstantial with the Father.” This phrase is rich in theological implications.

Several last examples of the new translations:
At the consecration of the wine, the priest used to say “the Blood of the new and eternal covenant which will be SHED for you.” Now the text says: “The Blood of the new and eternal covenant which will be POURED OUT for you.” The phrase “poured out” is much richer an expression, reinforcing that Jesus bled and died for us willingly, of His own choice. Secondly, the image suggests bleeding to the very last drop (poured out), total giving and surrender for our redemption. The new phrase is not only more concrete and poetic (visual), but also tells the listener much about Jesus’s attitude and approach to His suffering and death.

Another example is found in the second Eucharistic Prayer where the priest now says, “Make holy, therefore, these gifts, we pray, by sending down your Spirit upon them LIKE THE DEWFALL.” The image of the Holy Spirit descending like the morning dew upon the grass suggests, not only the Spirit’s gift of freshening and renewing what might otherwise be dried out, but also the gentleness with which the Holy Spirit moves within liturgical life and our own personal lives.

In the same Eucharistic Prayer the priest used to pray for our beloved deceased, saying, “Welcome them into the light of your PRESENCE.” The new prayer says” “Welcome them into the light of your FACE.” The faithful departed meet God, face to face, and that face is radiant with light—clearly the light of a smiling, radiant, loving face, the face of our God.

Finally, in the Third Eucharistic Prayer, the priest used to say “that from EAST TO WEST a perfect offering be made be made to the glory of Your name.” Now the prayer is “ that FROM THE RISING OF THE SUN TO ITS SETTING a pure sacrifice may be offered to your name.” The reference to the rising and setting sun implies the span from East to West, as in the former translation, but is far more visual and concrete. It evokes the continuous offering of the Holy Mass across the globe, as night descends on one part of the world, the sun rises elsewhere and the Church’s universal liturgical prayer continues in an uninterrupted chain. It also implies the unity of all Christians across the globe, bound together in one Faith and one common, ongoing liturgical prayer.

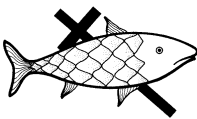


translating was to render the ancient Latin texts of the Mass prayers into a somewhat colloquial and conversational English that would be pleasant to the ear and comfortable to churchgoers who had always heard the prayers only in Latin. This approach to translation is sometimes called dynamic equivalency. In any event, accuracy of translation was sacrificed and meanings were changed to suit a somewhat conversational level of language and vocabulary

By the early 1990’s, and even before, the Vatican, and Pope John Paul II in particular, felt that, in some cases, too much of the scriptural texts and theological implications of the Mass texts had been sacrificed and lost in this translation process. Whole phrases of the scriptures had been radically changed and subtle theological ideas had been lost or eliminated. Pope John Paul’s view was that the first translation had served the church well for many decades in introducing vernacular (English) liturgy, but that it was now time to restore, by more accurate translation, some of the phrases and expressions of the original Latin that were replete with profound theological ideas and implications – in other words, to recover some of the scriptural and theological riches that had been lost from our weekly liturgical prayer.

Thus began a long process of almost twenty years in which scholars of every linguistic background, joined by scripture scholars and theologians, worked laboriously to review all the texts. Proposed translations were sent back and forth between the world’s Bishops and various church committees and councils. This process was repeated over and over, each accompanied by much debate and many revisions and endless rewriting. Finally, two years ago, it was felt that the retranslated texts could be introduced. For the United States, this meant the first Sunday of Advent, 2011.

One example of how the scriptural basis of a prayer had been lost and was restored is the prayer that we all say before Communion. For almost forty years we have been saying: “Lord, I am not worthy to receive You, but only say the word and I shall be healed.” This is a lovely prayer, but it is not the prayer that the Faithful said for untold centuries before the Vatican Council, nor is it based on the scripture, as was the original prayer. With the restored translation we now say “Lord, I am not worthy that you should enter under my roof, but only say the word and my soul shall be healed.” Now we enter into the scriptures and we repeat the very words attributed there to the Roman centurion who had asked Jesus to heal his ill servant When the Lord offered to come to his home, the



Translation of Prayers at Mass *(continued)*

It is, of course, somewhat awkward to try to break down these beautiful phrases and analyze them, but, if we have attentive ears, it is in their recitation at Mass that their beauty and depth may well take us by surprise. In all cases these were original phrases and images that had been lost to us in past decades.

It would be wonderful if we could use the new translations as a basis for slowly reading and reflecting on the newly translated sections, say perhaps, over the period of a year. We might explore what the implications are of saying that Christ is *consubstantial* with the Father. There is an abundance of material, even online, to help us plunge the depths of these newly surfaced theological

distinctions. Perhaps the institutional Church itself will, with time, offer some seminars and study groups, under expert guidance, for those seriously interested in studying what has been “recovered” in these newly translated texts.

In the end, these recent changes remind us all that we are always on a journey in our Christian life. We are never quite there, never quite at the goal after which we are striving. Thus we all struggle to be more kind, more understanding, a better listener, and so forth. So too with our prayer, we seek to deepen our private prayer life and now, in these first months of the new translation of the Roman Missal, as individuals, as a Parish, and as a Church, we say to Jesus, in the words of the Apostles, “Lord, teach us to pray.”

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CATECHUMENS PREPARE FOR EASTER SACRAMENTS

The RCIA—**Roman Catholic Initiation for Adults**—program at St. Francis culminates each year with the reception of the Sacraments by the candidates at Easter Vigil Mass. Below are some reflections by **Sister Helene**, and each of this year’s catechumens.

Sister Helene writes, “The RCIA is a process of conversion, inviting participants to enter into a journey of faith. It is the Church’s way of welcoming those adults seeking to become full members of the Catholic Church. The process is for those who have never been baptized, those baptized in another Christian tradition, and also for baptized Catholics who have not yet received the Sacraments of Confirmation and Eucharist. The process is not merely about converting from one religion to another; it is more about a conversion of heart, about seeking more meaning and purpose in one’s life, about deepening one’s relationship with God.

“As director of the RCIA, it has been my privilege over the years to journey with many men and women during the process. It has been such a blessing for me to share faith with those who are seeking to deepen their faith. My entire ministry in this wonderful parish is a source of joy for me, but the RCIA is probably the part of my ministry that I love the most. I feel my own personal faith is deepened each year during the process, and for that I am so grateful to all those who have been part of the RCIA here at St. Francis. How blessed I am and have been!”

Jeffrey O’Malley’s thoughts on his RCIA experience begin with a concept that all parishioners have heard from the pulpit from many different priests at many different times: that we all are the face of the Church, and need to be Christ for those we meet. Jeff says, “I came to the RCIA classes as a result of what I saw in two friends who are parishioners in Saint Francis Xavier. In one I saw a strength and faith that were part of all he said and did; in the other I saw an impassioned commitment to social justice through helping the poor, and her decades-long, active opposition to the death penalty.

“The RCIA process has strengthened my relationship with Catholicism by helping to see that my friends’ values are core values of the Catholic Church. It has subtly and completely become part of me – how I parent, work, spend time with and talk to my wife. This has been a gradual, quietly-growing process and one that has been very enjoyable. I could not have asked for better teachers than Sister Helene, Father Bill, or Frank Greene, and I thank them, as well as Fathers George Deas and Mark Burke for their contributions to this rich process, which has made Love and Grace feel closer and more available.”

Laetitia Brown came to the RCIA from a different perspective. “Growing up I didn’t get much of a consistent spiritual or religious experience. My grandmother was a devout Catholic, and raised my mother and aunts in the church. My parents, though, were of different faiths and decided not to have me baptized to avoid conflicts. I remember going to Mass sometimes, and especially having doughnuts after. I didn’t attend regularly until I was about eight, when my grandmother had me baptized, and enrolled me in CCD classes. I also sang in the cherub choir, and was very much looking forward to my first Communion. I don’t know exactly why, but I had a strong desire to partake in the Eucharist from a very young age. I didn’t understand what it actually meant, but it was important to me. Something happened that I don’t remember, and I never completed the classes or received my first Communion.

“Over the next five years of my life, I followed my mother through a phase of spiritual searching and seeking. We went to just about every kind of church there is, many of which lacked the grandeur, mystery and beauty of Catholic churches and rituals. Some of the churches were overwhelming and extreme, with goings-on that came just short of snake handling. I thought these people were crazy! And I still never got anything like a communion experience.

“By the time I’d reached adolescence and began to ‘think for myself,’ I had lost much of my faith in God and the Church. I had some really traumatic

experiences as a teenager that alienated me even further from God, but in some strange way also proved God’s existence and concern for me. However, I refused to accept His love and I lived a self-centered, self-willed train wreck of a life for many lonely and desperate years.



“I was reading a book about prayer by John Edwards, the medium, who is also Catholic, a few years ago, and something in me clicked. I opened my heart to God, and slowly but surely since that day, I’ve gotten closer and closer to Him, and relinquished my life more and more to His will. I’m still – almost thirty years later-very much looking forward to my First Holy Communion.”

Karl Greenberg writes, “I came to the RCIA program after years of thinking about Catholicism, even before I got married. My wife is Catholic, and we are raising my daughter in the Church, while I had never really been involved in any organized faith. Although I began attending Mass once I married, it was on an on-again, off-again basis; I always felt a bit like an interloper. I never

took communion, never crossed myself, and pretty much just went through the motions.

“I think it was a combination of realizing that my daughter’s participation in the faith might be impacted if it didn’t involve both her parents, and my recognition of myself as someone who is always on the outside of everything, never committed to anything – being ‘agnostic’ in all things – that made me decide to at least learn something about the Church through RCIA.

“I’d probably give myself a C+ in participation (only in terms of keeping up with the readings), but I’ve surprised myself in at least one respect. I actually not only show up to all our meetings, but really enjoy them. I was a religion major in college (figure that one out!), so this is an area I really love. And sometimes, when I’m not too self-absorbed, I actually feel lucky to have discovered this program, and look forward to really participating in the Eucharist.”

The experience of **Andrew Ingkavet** is as different and similar to the others as it is compelling. “The RCIA program has been a very deep and moving experience for me. I grew up without a formalized religious education. And yet, for as long as I can remember, I’ve always felt that there is something greater than just this – I’ve been hungry for the answers of a greater self, a spirituality. I asked my parents why we never went to temple or church or had any kind of rituals. My Thai-Chinese father claimed that ‘everything I teach you is Buddhist. You are Buddhist.’ My Korean mother did go to church sometimes, but it was in Korean, and not very interesting to me at the time, though the picnics were outstanding! I felt lost.

“In my twenties, I started to dive deep into reading, researching, and seeking out information on spirituality. I read all kinds of books: New Age books, personal growth, self-help and Buddhist books, Christian and even Scientology books. Books by Thich Nhat Hanh, M. Scott Peck, Robert Pirsig and Teilhard de Chardin were all gulped down as well as works by self-help gurus such as Tony Robbins, Louise Hays, and Steven Covey. My acting classes were a substitute for a spiritual life, as were the volumes and volumes of journals I wrote. My music composition, and my crazy career path have all been in search of my purpose, my search for God. I was still lost, but getting closer.

“When I married my wife, Monica, in 1992, I began accompanying her to church. At first, it was once in a while, but then it began to be more regular. I began to see the beauty of the church as a community supporting each other in our spiritual lives. I’ve been very moved and inspired by the many deep discussions with the other members in my RCIA group, and with Sister Helene, Father Bill, and Frank Greene. I feel like I’ve finally found what I’ve been looking for. I’ve learned so much about myself and have grown in so many ways. I’m very grateful to the Parish of St. Francis Xavier for this wonderful program.”

