



CATHOLIC BISHOPS' CONFERENCE OF ENGLAND AND WALES

NATIONAL PASTORAL LETTER ON THE NEW TRANSLATION OF THE ROMAN MISSAL

TO BE READ ON THE SIXTH SUNDAY OF EASTER, 29 MAY 2011

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ

At the beginning of Advent this year, when we gather for Mass, we shall be using the new translation of the Roman Missal. This will be the case not only in England and Wales but throughout the English-speaking world. The Mass will remain the same but parts of it will sound different.

Since the Second Vatican Council, the Church has produced three Latin editions of the Roman Missal. At present, we are still using a translation of the first edition which was published in 1973. Although the texts we have been using have served us well, since that time there has been much development in the liturgical texts themselves and in our understanding of them.

We all become very accustomed to the words we hear; and the fact that we have been praying in a certain way for so long has imprinted that style of language and words upon our consciousness and made them very special. The changes in the language now to be introduced, however, do not represent change for change's sake, but are being made in order to ensure greater fidelity to the liturgical tradition of the Church. In the earlier translation not all the meaning of the original Latin text was fully expressed and a number of the terms that were used to convey the teachings of the faith were lost. This was readily acknowledged by the bishops of the Church, even back in the 1970s, and has become an increasing cause of concern since then.

There is an old adage in Latin which states that the way we pray forms the way we believe. So words and language are important for the teaching and the handing-on of the faith.

So what does this new translation offer us? First of all, there is a fuller expression of the content of the original texts. Then, there is a closer connection with the Sacred Scriptures which inspire so much of our liturgy. Also, there is a recovery of a vocabulary that enriches our understanding of the mystery we celebrate. All of this requires a unique style of language and expression, one that takes us out of ourselves and draws us into the sacred, the transcendent and the divine.

The publication of the new translation of the Missal is a special moment of grace in the English-speaking world. It offers an opportunity to deepen our knowledge and understanding of the mystery we celebrate each week. This itself will help us to move towards that fuller and more conscious and active participation in the liturgy to which the Church invites us. It will help us also to examine the dignity with which we celebrate the 'source and summit' of the Church's life.

At the end of his visit last year, Pope Benedict asked us to use this moment for genuine renewal. He said: *"I encourage you now to seize the opportunity that the new translation offers for in-depth catechesis on the Eucharist, and renewed devotion in the manner of its celebration. 'The more lively the Eucharistic faith of the people of God, the deeper is its sharing in ecclesial life in steadfast commitment to the mission entrusted by Christ to his disciples'"* (*Sacramentum Caritatis*, 6).¹

In order to achieve this, the bishops have produced resources for all our parishes and, as from September, we will gradually begin to use the new liturgical texts at Mass and hear why certain changes have been made. Each diocese is already preparing its priests and deacons, catechists and liturgical ministers. Programmes for schools are being developed and new musical settings are being composed. From September until Advent everyone will have the opportunity to study the new texts and familiarise themselves with the prayers and chants. In addition, this period of preparation will allow us to pray these new texts.

The Liturgy of the Eucharist is a gift, something we receive from God through the Church. Saint Paul spoke of it as coming from the Lord Jesus himself. Writing to the Church in Corinth, he said, *"for I received from the Lord what I in turn also handed on to you"* (1 Corinthians 11:23). So Eucharist is not something of our making but a gift received. Like Saint Paul, therefore, let us receive it with reverence and care, knowing that we are being faithful to what the Lord himself passed on to the Apostles, which has been handed on since, in faithfulness, by their successors to every generation of the Church.

Let us welcome the new translation of the Roman Missal as a sign of our unity and a powerful instrument of God's grace in our lives.

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¹ Address to the Bishops gathered at Oscott College, Sunday, 19 September 2010