

The Roman Missal Translation - Lost (and Found) in Translation

by Joe Paprocki, D. Todd Williamson

As we continue to explore the new *Roman Missal* translation, we turn our attention to the realities of translating. Traveling to a foreign country where a different language is spoken can be daunting. Finding the correct words and phrases to maneuver through airports, train stations, restaurants, and market places can range from comedic to frustrating. Often, things get lost in translation.

It is important to remember that the Church's universal liturgical language is Latin. This means that, in order for the new *Roman Missal* translation to be implemented all over the world, it needs to comfortably and appropriately find a home in numerous vernacular languages. For English-speaking countries, this task began shortly after the 3rd edition of the *Roman Missal* was issued in 2000. The *Roman Missal* translation that we will be implementing in Advent 2011, however, has a very different flavor from the translation of the second edition that we've been using these last few decades. So, what's different about this translation and, more specifically, why does it sound different? What will be happening to the words we use at Mass?

In the first years of the renewal of the liturgy after the Second Vatican Council, the art of translating the Latin liturgical texts was just developing. The very first formal guidelines for translating Latin texts, contained in a document issued in 1969 (*Comme le Prevoit, Instruction on the translation of liturgical texts for celebrations with a congregation*), followed a principle of translation that is known as *dynamic equivalence*. The main characteristic of this principle is that, when translating from one language to another, what is emphasized is the *meaning*, or the *message* of the text. So, under this principle, the English would not necessarily be a literal, word-for-word translation of the Latin.

The art of translating liturgical texts, however, is an organic art that has developed since the 1960's. For example, at one time we crossed ourselves saying, "In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy *Ghost*," instead of "Holy Spirit." Even more recently, some will recall when, at the end of the first or second reading, the lector said, "*This is the Word of the Lord.*" instead of the current phrase, "The Word of the Lord."

New Ideas about the Roman Missal Translation

The developing nature of the art of translating liturgical texts became evident in 2001 when the Vatican issued new guidelines (*Liturgiam Authenticam, Instruction on the use of vernacular languages in the publication of the books of the Roman Liturgy*) to guide the *Roman Missal* translation of the third edition, which Pope John Paul II had promulgated that same year. These guidelines follow a principle of translation known as *formal equivalence*. The main

characteristic of this principle is that, when translating from one language to another, what is emphasized is literal fidelity, rendering a word-for-word translation of the original source text.

In practical terms, the English used in the new *Roman Missal* translation will sound different from the current translation mainly because the methods and principles of translation that are used have changed.

As we prepare to implement the new *Roman Missal* translation in Advent 2011, we experience the excitement of discovering new words and phrases that adhere to the original Latin text more faithfully. We hope that these new words, previously lost in translation, will enable us to communicate our praise and worship of a good and gracious God, whose glory transcends all words.

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