Translation seeks accurate, reliable statement of faith

The previous missal was published in 1970, followed by a 1975 edition.

BY JAMES BREIG

The Roman Missal is the book containing the prescribed prayers, chants and instructions for the celebration of Mass in the Roman Catholic Church. The Roman Missal translated into English under 1969 Vatican rules will be replaced when the third edition of the Roman Missal is introduced on the First Sunday of Advent, Nov. 27.

Because a new edition of the Latin Roman Missal was promulgated by Pope John Paul II in 2001, it is necessary for all the countries of the world to translate this missal into the vernacular, says Msgr. Anthony Sherman, executive director of the U.S. bishops’ Secretariat of Divine Worship, in explaining why the changes are being made.

But translation is not something easy to accomplish, concedes Msgr. Kevin Irwin, dean of the School of Theology and Religious Studies at The Catholic University of America in Washington, D.C.

“We all bring our own prejudices and ideas to translation,” he says. “It is hoped that the new texts will be more accurate so that our faith and our statements of faith are reliable.”

Changes rare

One of the earliest indications of the format for the Mass is found in the letters of St. Paul, said Carolyn Lassek, director of the Liturgy Office for the Archdiocese of Seattle. The early Christians met mostly in homes, and an oral tradition of extemporaneous prayers by the celebrating bishop evolved from this “domestic church.”

By the second century, early descriptions of the order of the eucharistic celebration emerged, including a letter by St. Justin Martyr to the Emperor Antoninus Pius in A.D. 155 that describes the Mass we celebrate today. (See letter, page M4.)

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Even as the fathers in the Second Vatican Council approved translation of the Latin prayers into the vernacular, Lassek said, they recognized that their work would have to be revised and enriched.

“The experience of the power of the Holy Spirit in the Second Vatican Council concerning liturgy was expressed in the ‘Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy,’ she said. “It was important for the fathers of the council to provide a translation of the Mass in vernacular that the people could begin to experience.”

By the 1980s, she said, the work of revisiting and enriching the original translation had begun.

Partially as a result of the first experience of translation, bishops’ conferences around the world have repeatedly stressed that the new translation should not be used without prior and significant explanation.

“One of the things we did not do 40 years ago, when the liturgy was first put into the vernacular, was to explain the changes fully,” Father Turner said.

Lassek, who has helped parish leadership in the Archdiocese of Seattle prepare for implementation of the new missal over the past two and a half years, agreed.

“Above all,” she said, “the implementation process has rekindled our appreciation of and gratitude for so gracious a God who gifted us with the Eucharist.”

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Language of love

Lassek adds that the new translation is intended to be more faithful to Scripture as well as a more literal translation from the Latin. She also notes that the “graced and gifted character of the Mass” requires a special language.

“The liturgy is the language of love, and poetry is the best expression of love. So the language of the eucharistic celebrations demands a richer, more poetic imagery,” she said.
Catholics are very familiar with the parts of the Mass — perhaps too familiar. Sunday after Sunday, we recite certain words, such as “Amen … Thanks be to God … Alleluia … Holy, Holy, Holy Lord.”

These words are so ingrained in us that we often say them, almost robotically, out of routine. Indeed, if someone woke us in the middle of the night and said, “The Lord be with you,” many of us would roll over and instinctively respond, “And also with you.”

But do we really grasp the meaning of these words? Do we understand the significance of what we are doing and saying in the liturgy?

The new English translation of the Mass, which will be promulgated Nov. 27, will provide a unique opportunity for Catholics to reflect on the meaning of the prayers in the liturgy. This updated translation will bring about the most significant change in the way most English-speaking Catholics participate in the Mass since the years following the Second Vatican Council (1962–1965), when the liturgical texts were translated into English and officially used in worship for the first time.

The basic structure of the prayers will remain the same, but the changes in wording at many points throughout the liturgy will be quite noticeable. For a time, most Catholics will no longer be able to walk into church on Sunday and automatically recite the Gloria, the creed, and other Mass parts by memory. They will need a guide to help them become accustomed to the new translation of these prayers.

As we are taken out of our routine, we will have the opportunity to ponder the significance of all that we say and do in the liturgy and rediscover the splendor of the Mass.

‘ONLY BEGOTTEN SON’

The opening words of the Gloria echo the hymns of praise sung by the angels over the fields of Bethlehem on that first Christmas night: “Glory to God in the highest.”

Just as the Son of God was made manifest to the world some 2,000 years ago, so he is made present sacramentally on our altars at the consecration at every Mass. Thus, it is fitting to welcome Jesus with words of praise that echo how the angels heralded Christ’s coming in Bethlehem.

One noticeable change in the new translation of the Gloria involves Jesus being addressed as the “Only Begotten Son.”

The new translation more closely follows the theological language used in the early church to highlight how Jesus is uniquely God’s Son, sharing in the same divine nature as the Father. This also reflects the biblical language in John’s Gospel, which uses similar wording to describe Jesus’ singular relationship with the Father.

While all believers are called to a special relationship with God as his sons and daughters through grace (see Jn 1:12; 1 Jn 3:1), Jesus alone is the eternal, divine Son by nature. He is the “only begotten Son” of the Father (see Jn 1:14, 18; 3:16, 18).

Source: Adapted from “A Biblical Walk Through the Mass: Understanding What We Say and Do in the Liturgy” by Dr. Edward Sri, provost and professor of theology at the Augustine Institute in Denver.
‘THROUGH MY MOST GRIEVOUS FAULT’

During the penitential rite, instead of simply saying that I have sinned “through my own fault,” as we have done in the old translation, we will repeat our sorrow three times while striking our breasts in a sign of repentance, saying: “I have sinned through my fault, through my fault, through my most grievous fault.”

When we have done something wrong to someone we love, we do not merely make an apology. We deeply feel sorrow over our actions and we often apologize several times and in varying ways: “I’m so sorry … I really regret doing that … I should not have said that … Please forgive me.”

This newly translated prayer in the liturgy helps us recognize that sinning against God is no light matter. The revised translation of this prayer helps the Christian express even more heartfelt contrition and humbly admit that one has sinned “through my fault, through my fault, through my most grievous fault.”

Source: Adapted from “A Biblical Walk Through the Mass: Understanding What We Say and Do in the Liturgy” by Dr. Edward Sri, provost and professor of theology at the Augustine Institute in Denver.
3RD CENTURY
Latin emerges in worship; widely used by the 10th century.

4TH CENTURY
Concern for orthodoxy leads worship to become more standardized.

7TH-8TH CENTURIES
Sacramentaries emerge; prayer texts shared.

1545-1563
Council of Trent convenes; codifies celebration of Mass and defines various church teachings.

1570
Missal of Pius V, the first Roman Missal, implements the Council of Trent’s call for uniformity in liturgy.

1604
Pope Clement VIII replaces missal with corrected version.

1634
Pope Urban VIII promulgates revised missal.

1884
Pope Leo XIII introduces new missal with changes made since 1634.

1951-1955
Pope Pius XII introduces changes in Holy Week liturgies.

1963
Second Vatican Council issues Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy calling for “full, conscious and active participation” of all people in the liturgy.

1969

1975

2001
Third edition of the Roman Missal promulgated by Pope John Paul II; English translation approved in 2009.

2011
Implementation of the third edition of the Roman Missal in English-speaking countries.

Sources: USCCB, Secretariat for Divine Worship; Vatican documents.

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Mass in English
The English translation of the missal is being introduced in these countries:

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ineffable (in-ef-uh-buhl) adj. 1. incapable of being expressed or described in words; inexpressible: ineffable joy. 2. not to be spoken because of its sacredness; unutterable: the ineffable name of the deity.

consubstantial (kon-suhb-stan-shuhl) adj. of one and the same substance, essence, or nature.

inviolate (in-vahy-uh-lit, -leyt) adj. 1. free from violation, injury, desecration, or outrage. 2. undisturbed; untouched. 3. unbroken.
The Second Vatican Council called the Eucharist “the source and summit of the Christian life.” The Mass is the central act of worship for Catholics, ordered in four major parts:

- Introductory Rites
- Liturgy of the Word
- Liturgy of the Eucharist
- Concluding Rites

Although the third edition of the Roman Missal contains changes in the prayers and instructions for celebrating the eucharistic liturgy, the fundamental structure of the Mass that has been preserved throughout the centuries will remain unchanged.

The Introductory Rites precede the Liturgy of the Word and include the entrance, the greeting, the penitential act, the Kyrie, the Gloria and the collect.

The Liturgy of the Word begins with Scripture readings and responsorial psalm. It concludes with the homily, the profession of faith, or creed, and the intercessory prayer of the faithful.

The Nicene Creed, which is a brief summary of Christian faith, comes from the Councils of Nicaea (A.D. 325) and Constantinople (A.D. 381).

Epiclesis is the prayer petitioning the Father to send the Holy Spirit to sanctify offerings of bread and wine so that they may become the body and blood of Christ.

Every eucharistic prayer contains an anamnesis or memorial in which the church calls to mind with thanksgiving and praise Jesus’ passion and resurrection.

Holy Communion is the reception of the body and blood of Christ in the Eucharist.

The rite of peace is a petition for peace, and an expression of ecclesial communion and mutual charity before communicating in the sacrament.

Christ’s gesture of breaking bread at the Last Supper is the eucharistic action by the priest that gives the fraction rite its name.

The Communion rite consists of preparatory rites including the Lord’s Prayer, the rite of peace, and fraction, followed by Communion and the prayer after Communion.

The Concluding Rites consist of brief announcements, the priest’s greeting and blessing, the dismissal of the people and the kissing of the altar by the priest.

The collect is the opening prayer that literally “collects” the prayers of all who are gathered into one prayer led by the celebrant.

The Liturgy of the Eucharist is the central part of the Mass. It is the prayer of thanksgiving and consecration and begins with the preface dialogue (“The Lord be with you … Lift up your hearts … Let us give thanks to the Lord our God”) and concludes with a final doxology or prayer of praise and glory to God (“Through him, and with him, and in him”).

At the Concluding Rites there are frequently brief announcements prior to the priest greeting, blessing and dismissing the people to go about their lives doing good works, praising and blessing God.

Each part of the Mass has a specific meaning and purpose.

The introductory rites are an introduction and a preparation of those assembled. These rites establish communion among the faithful who come together as one and are intended to prepare them to listen to the word of God and to celebrate the Eucharist.

The Liturgy of the Word is first and foremost the readings from sacred Scripture together with the chants occurring between them. This part of the liturgy is concluded with the homily, the profession of faith, or creed, and the intercessory prayer of the faithful.

The Concluding Rites consist of: brief announcements, the priest’s greeting and blessing, the dismissal of the people and the kissing of the altar by the priest.

Welcoming the new translation of the Roman Missal is an opportunity for the faithful to reacquaint themselves with the eucharistic liturgy.

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As early as the second century we have the witness of St. Justin Martyr for the basic lines of the order of the Eucharistic celebration. St. Justin wrote to the pagan emperor Antoninus Pius (138–161) around the year 155, explaining what Christians did:

On the day we call the day of the sun, all who dwell in the city or country gather in the same place.

The memoirs of the apostles and the writings of the prophets are read, as much as time permits.

When the reader has finished, he who presides over those gathered admonishes and challenges them to imitate these beautiful things.

Then we all rise together and offer prayers for ourselves … and for all others, wherever they may be, so that we may be found righteous by our life and actions, and faithful to the commandments, so as to obtain eternal salvation.

When the prayers are concluded we exchange the kiss.

Then someone brings bread and a cup of water and wine mixed together to him who presides over the brethren.

He takes them and offers praise and glory to the Father of the universe, through the name of the Son and of the Holy Spirit and for a considerable time he gives thanks (in Greek: eucharistian) that we have been judged worthy of these gifts.

When he has concluded the prayers and thanksgivings, all present give voice to an acclamation by saying: “Amen.”

When he who presides has given thanks and the people have responded, those whom we call deacons give to those present the “eucharisted” bread, wine and water and take them to those who are absent.

Source: CCC 1345

‘On the day we call the day of the sun’