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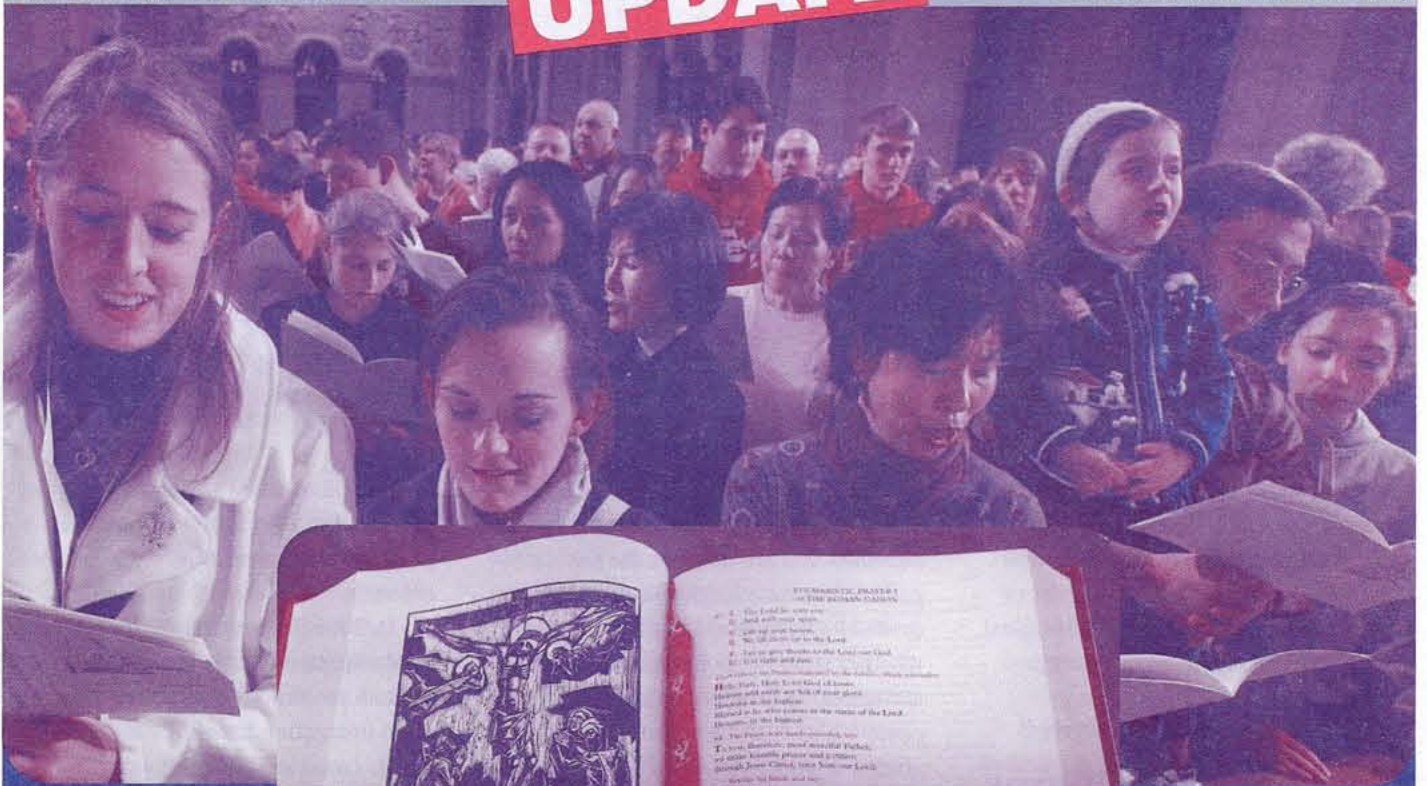
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UPDATE

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PHOTOS FROM CINSIMANCY WIECHEC, PAUL HARRING

The Roman Missal

EMBRACING THE NEW TRANSLATION

BY REV. RICHARD HILGARTNER

SOON WE WILL BE NOTICING some changes at Mass. In late 2011, at the beginning of Advent, newly translated prayers will be used at liturgy in the dioceses of the United States (and throughout the English-speaking world). In this *Update* we'll take a look at the reasons behind those changes. They offer us a chance to understand more deeply the liturgy itself.

The Roman Missal, source of the prayers, is now in its third edition. It is marked by a shift from the style of language of its predecessors. The first and second editions of the *Roman Missal* in English (formerly called the *Sacramentary*), officially introduced in 1974 and 1985, respectively, were marked by a style of English that was immediately accessible and easy to understand. The prayers themselves, though, were not always accurate

translations of the original Latin texts.

The *Roman Missal, Third Edition*, on the other hand, makes use of a more formal style of English. The prayers are intended to be more literal renderings of the original Latin texts so that the meaning contained in them is accurately expressed in English.

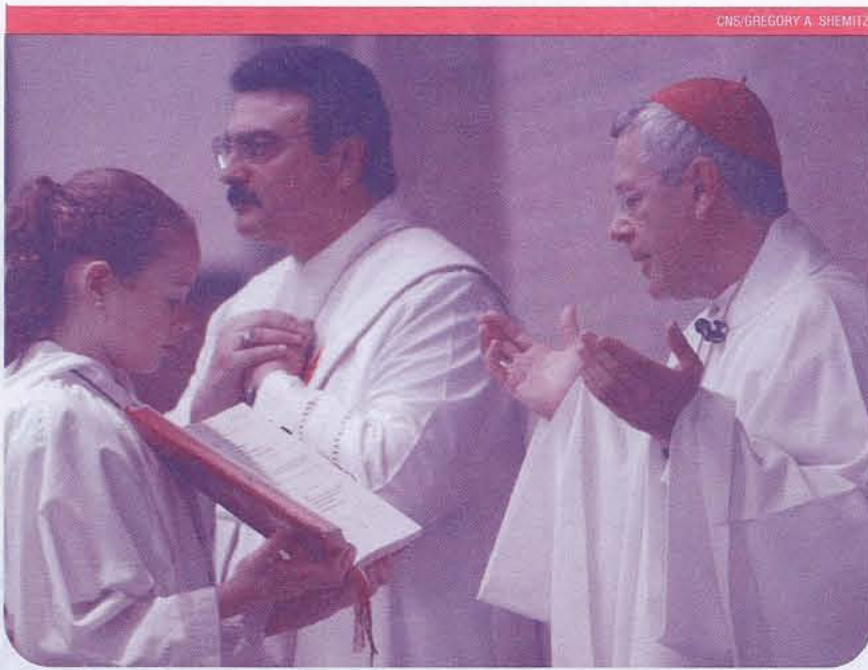
Listening to and praying the prayers of the Mass, essential ingredients of active participation in the liturgy, will require some work. Some background on the nature of the prayers, the principles of translation, and the purpose of liturgical prayer will help all of us to take up this work.

The work of the liturgy

The word *liturgy*, in its technical meaning in the Church, refers to all the official public rites in our worship. It includes the celebration of the sacraments, especially the Eucharist (Mass), the Liturgy of the Hours (such as morning and evening prayer), and other rites: funeral rites, religious profession, Exposition and Benediction of the Blessed Sacrament, particular blessings and so on.

The word comes from the Greek, *leitourgia*, which referred in classical Greek to a “public work” or a work performed on behalf of the people. During New Testament times, *liturgy* was used in various forms to describe the priestly work of Christ (in the Letter to the Hebrews) or to Paul as a minister (Romans). The word *liturgy*, in these examples, can refer to *work done on behalf of people* or *work done by particular people*.

For the Church today, liturgy is also a work. There are elements of our litur-



gy that are done *for the faithful* or *on behalf of the faithful*, and there are other elements that are done *by the faithful* gathered as the liturgical assembly. Our external participation in the liturgy—whether sung or spoken prayer, active and attentive listening, our gestures and postures, or even our silent prayer—is always a work.

All of this work is meant to foster an active interior participation in Christ and his work of loving us, of saving us. To participate and engage in the liturgy takes work on our part. Even though some particular liturgical minister, whether priest, deacon, reader, server or cantor, may be doing work for the assembly, each of us has an essential role as well.

So, the liturgy is a work that we all do together. The prayers of the Mass help us to do that work. For many hundreds of years these prayers were in Latin for people worldwide. Since the Second Vatican Council, in the 1960s, those Latin prayers have been translated into local languages.

The principles of translation

The guiding principles of translation of liturgical texts have evolved since the years immediately following the Second Vatican Council. After all, translating

texts is a relatively new experience in modern times.

Pope Paul VI, in an address to translators of liturgical texts gathered in Rome in 1965, explained the priorities: “The vernacular now taking its place in the liturgy ought to be within the grasp of all, even children and the uneducated. But, as you well know, the language should always be worthy of the noble realities

it signifies, set apart from the everyday speech of the street and the marketplace, so that it will affect the spirit and enkindle the heart with love of God.”

In 2001, in preparation for the new, third edition of the *Roman Missal*, the Vatican presented translating guidelines in an instruction known by its Latin name, *Liturgiam Authenticam*.

That document presented these principles and rules which, while echoing the sentiment of Pope Paul, also articulate in a particular way the goals to be achieved in translated texts: “... While it is permissible to arrange the wording, the syntax and the style in such a way as to prepare a flowing vernacular text suitable to the rhythm of popular prayer, the original text insofar as possible, must be translated integrally and in the most exact manner, without omissions or additions in terms of their content, and without paraphrases or glosses” (#20).

Why pay such attention to this process? The ancient axiom of the Church, *Lex orandi, lex credendi* (“The law of prayer is the law of belief”) reminds us that what we say in prayer expresses what we believe. Because of that, great care should go into not only the formation or composition of the texts we use in the liturgy, but also into the translation of those texts from one language to another.



Liturgiam Authenticam points to this priority: “So that the content of the original texts may be evident and comprehensible even to the faithful who lack any special intellectual formation, the translations should be characterized by a kind of language which is easily understandable, yet which at the same time

preserves these texts’ dignity, beauty, and doctrinal precision” (#25).

In addition, translators strive to perceive and render accurately the words and phrases that are drawn from the Scripture and from other ancient sources, such as the writings of the Church Fathers and early liturgical texts.

The purpose and aim of liturgy

The words expressed in the liturgy, including the Mass, have two primary functions: to communicate God’s Word to the assembly and to communicate the gathered assembly’s prayer and praise to God.

The liturgy is *dialogical* in nature: not just in terms of dialogues between the priest and the people (e.g., “The Lord be with you... and with your spirit,”) but essentially the dialogue between God and his people gathered in worship. In words of prayer we express our praise and gratitude for God’s blessings, our needs and longings for which we ask God’s help, and our sorrow and contrition for our failings.

In the liturgy, God speaks to his people in order to teach and form us, to encourage and forgive us. The texts of the liturgy (especially in the *Roman*

Missal) help us to express the full range of these sentiments throughout the liturgical year.

Of course, at any given time the prayers of individuals might be other than what the liturgy expresses. For example, while the Church gives thanks and rejoices in the wonder of the Incarnation, the birth of Christ, at Christmas, some might be struggling with pain, sadness or grief. Here the quiet prayers of our hearts are still lifted up in worship. The liturgical texts speak a word of comfort and hope.

Praying the *Roman Missal, Third Edition*

In light of the principles and priorities mentioned above, the *Roman Missal, Third Edition* strives to present texts that, as Pope Paul said in 1965, “affect the spirit and enkindle the heart with love of God.” Spoken words of the liturgy do more than just communicate truth or articulate sentiments; they must move the heart and lead worshipers to a sense of devotion.

The prayers of the 1974 *Sacramentary*, which we have been using for these past decades, appear to have striven for brevity and conciseness of expression. The 2010 *Roman Missal* texts generally offer a more poetic

form of expression. For example, the Collect (Opening Prayer, proclaimed by the priest) for the Ninth Sunday in Ordinary Time:

1974 *Sacramentary*
 Father,
 your love never fails.
 Hear our call.
 Keep us from danger,
 and provide for all
 our needs.

2010 *Roman Missal*
 O God,

whose providence never fails in its design,
 keep from us, we humbly beseech you,
 all that might harm us
 and grant all that works for our good.

Both texts express essentially the same truth, but the 2010 translation is a more elaborate form of expression. In addition, the phrase, “we humbly beseech you,” which is a common sentiment in the *Missal*, helps the worshiper to find a right stance before God.

We do not dare tell God what we expect, but as disciples we stand humbly before God and implore his mercy, because we recognize that we do not earn or deserve the good things that come from God’s grace.

From east to west

In Eucharistic Prayer III we find an example of a frequent shift in the style of translation. In the 1974 *Sacramentary* we heard, “From age to age you gather a people to yourself, so that from east to west a perfect offering may be made to the glory of your name.” The same phrase in the 2010 *Roman Missal* is translated: “...you never cease to gather a people to yourself, so that, from the

rising of the sun to its setting, a pure sacrifice may be offered to your name....”

The evocative metaphor “from the rising of the sun to its setting” more accurately renders the Latin text, which quotes directly from Psalm 113: “From the rising of the sun to its setting, may the name of the Lord be praised.” It speaks not only of the vast places where God’s name is praised (“east to west”) but also of the passage of time, as if to say, “from the beginning to the end of the day” or “from one generation to the next.”

The Collect (Opening Prayer) for the Easter Vigil illustrates the use of complex sentences to articulate the primacy of God’s action and the effects of his grace on us.

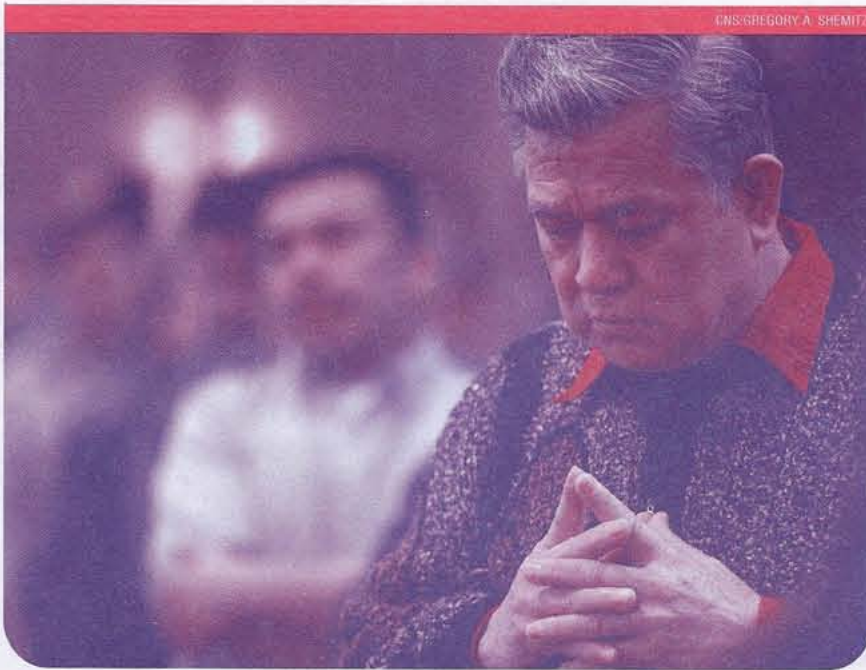
1974 *Sacramentary*

Lord God,
you have brightened this night
with the radiance of the risen Christ.
Quicken the spirit of sonship in
your Church;
renew us in mind and body
to give you whole-hearted service.

2010 *Roman Missal*

O God,
who make this most sacred night
radiant
with the glory of the Lord’s
Resurrection,
stir up in your Church a spirit of
adoption,
so that, renewed in body and mind,
we may render you undivided service.

Whereas the 1974 translation seems to list several petitions “Quicken the spirit...” and “renew us...”, the 2010



foster reverence and gratitude in the face of God’s majesty, his power, his mercy and his transcendent nature, the translations will respond to the hunger and thirst for the living God that is experienced by the people of our own time” (#25). The new translation is a response to the needs of our time.

To pray the liturgy well will take work,

both for priests and for the faithful. The fruit of that labor, flowing from a language of prayer that moves and stirs our hearts, will be a work that gives God an offering of praise. The People of God, gathered in liturgical assemblies, will be attuned to God’s presence and able to express themselves in a way that fosters a right relationship with the Lord. Isn’t that why we go to Mass? ■

translation shows the cause-and-effect relationship between the various ideas: the “spirit of adoption” stirred up in us is what renews us and makes possible the undivided service that we render to God.

Patience, people

The hope and prayer of translators is that the new translation will help all of us to pray at our best. In the words of *Liturgiam Authenticam*, “By means of words of praise and adoration that

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NEXT: The Lord’s Supper
(by Marc L. Greenberg)

UPDATE

Question Box

- 1) How does the way we worship shape our beliefs?
- 2) Is liturgy ever a “work” for you? How?
- 3) Name a time when you were moved at liturgy. What was happening in your life?

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