



Sacred Heart

Catholic Church

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Homily Fr. Paul Ward

Saturday, July 9, and Sunday, July 10, 2011
Fifteenth Week of Ordinary Time, Cycle A
Sacred Heart Catholic Church, Imlay City

The New English Translations of the Mass: An Introduction

[At the 10AM: With great joy I greet not only all of our regular parishioners, but the youth and chaperones of World Youth Day, who are preparing to have this experience of God, the Pope and the Church in Spain a month from now. I ask you as a parish to pray for these young people, that God may pour out huge and abundant blessings upon them, and grant them those spiritual goods they most need and desire. Let WYD be a spiritual apostolate, an apostolate of prayer for young people, an apostolate of the whole Church!]

The topic for my homily today is the new translations we will have of the Roman Missal. You have all heard that it is coming, where we'll be saying, "The Lord be with you / And with your spirit," or again, the Gloria will start "Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace to people of good will. We praise you, we bless you, we adore you," etc. The words of the sign of the Cross and the Our Father are not changed, by the way.

The new translation will begin being used in Advent of this year. From now until then, I will provide homilies only on this topic, going over the Mass piece by piece with as much detail as time will allow, so you all know what and why. Nothing in the Mass is changing, only the English words, and only in the English language. I am overjoyed that the text will now adhere more closely to the Latin.

Today's homily is a small introduction into what this is all about, and next week we shall look at the start of the Mass and the penitential rite in all their specifics.

First point: What is the nature of the change that we are all about to experience? As I said, it is an improved translation. The official language of the Catholic Church is Latin, and so the Latin Missal of the Mass is normative for every other translation into any other language anywhere in the world. For five decades, those who know Latin and who study the liturgy have complained loudly and ceaselessly to Rome that there are huge, magnificently huge discrepancies between what the Latin says, and what we are saying in English. Being fluent in four languages, having taught several including Latin and Greek, and having studied ten languages, I bear witness that the complaints are well founded, and that no other language deviates from the Latin so spectacularly as the English. These new translations are a great blessing.

Second point: How did we get bad translations to begin with? After the Second Vatican Council, even though the Church said that Latin should still be retained in the rites, Bishops' Conferences around the world abandoned Latin wholesale and started using their local languages. Various English speaking nations established a committee called "ICEL," an acronym for the International Commission on English in the Liturgy. They desired to apply certain principles in their translations. They decided to make the words didactic and utilitarian. They stripped the translations of many metaphors, metaphors that are actually found in the scriptures, to just "get to the point" and say things "plainly," according to their opinions of what plainness is. In my opinion, they dumbed it down, and in the process, they got so far away from what the Latin text actually said, they were re-writing every sentence of the liturgy as if they were authors writing their own original books.

Third point: What's wrong with the current translation? No one likes to talk about this, because it is politically incorrect. But in fact, we wouldn't need new translations if the ones we're using now didn't have serious problems. Rome finally intervened in 2001 with a document called *Liturgiam Autenticam*, which commanded the bishops to provide faithful translations – implying obviously that we did not have them. It took the Bishops of the English Speaking world more than ten years to respond with the new translations we are about to use. I don't know what my bishop would do to me if I took ten years to respond to one of his commands! But at last, the new translations are here. What was wrong with the old ones is that they lost their scriptural references, their poetic language, their mystical unction, their metaphors, their sacred inspiration and feeling, and the actual concepts behind the words with the texts – words matter, and a change in any word is a slight change in concept! This is all *very* important! They lost, in a sense, their beauty and their truth. Not that the current translation isn't true, but it's only 1% of the 100% of the truth the Church is trying to communicate to the faithful!

Let us stop there for today. Now I hope you see what the problem was, how Rome has responded to it urged by five decades worth of complaints about the new translation from every corner of the world, and how we are about to get a much more beautiful, sacred, spiritual, mystical, truth-filled, literal translation than we have ever had before. In my opinion the results will be splendid, and the next generation will be the more benefitted for it.

Because of all of this, I have decided that as the year goes on, we'll use an occasional bit of Latin, along side of the English, so that between one Mass and another, you too may appreciate all that is going on here, not just conceptually, but experientially. This, in fact, is the explicit wish of the Second Vatican Council in its constitution on the Liturgy, that Latin will be used in Mass. We will find the right and prudent way to incorporate all of this. I hope also, if time allows me to prepare them, to develop photocopies so that during the various homilies, you can compare the texts, left and right, of many of the passages I shall be preaching about. I think that will also help.

Our musical settings will change, because the words and syllabication is all different. Some diocese may start using the new music as early as September, and I am currently awaiting response from the Archdiocesan offices whether that is the case in the Archdiocese of

Detroit.

The Liturgy is worth all this effort. The liturgy is the action of the Trinity, who saves us in this world. It belongs to the Trinity before it belongs to us. Let us allow our lives to be transformed by the liturgy, through Mary's intercession, so that we may better know, love and follow Jesus Christ, and his mystical body which is the Catholic Church.■