

# What Is *The Roman Missal*?

Over the past several years, you have heard much through newspapers, blog postings, and Twitter about the revised translation of *The Roman Missal*. You may be wondering, “What is *The Roman Missal*, and how does this translation affect us?”

Take notice of the red book the priest uses most often during Mass. This book is called *The Sacramentary*, which together with the *Lectionary for Mass* make up *The Roman Missal*. The Missal is the collection of prayers, chants, and instructions (rubrics) used to celebrate Mass. This includes prayers such as the Sign of the Cross and opening greeting; Collects; Gloria; Creed; Eucharistic Prayers; Holy, Holy, Holy; Memorial Acclamations; and the final blessing. The majority of the prayers we recite or sing at Mass are contained in this book and it is these prayers that are currently being retranslated from the original Latin into English.

In the early Christian Church, many of the Mass prayers were memorized and handed down orally. Scribes eventually collected the prayers and recorded them in *liber sacramentum* (book of sacraments or sacramentaries). Other books were used for the scripture readings: *Lectionaries* and a *Book of the Gospels* (Evangeliary) for the scripture readings, and additional books for the chants and antiphons. Slight changes and additions developed as manuscripts were handed on and hand scribed. Eventually the chants, scripture readings, prayer texts, and instructions were compiled into a single volume, the *Missale Plenum* (complete Missal). When Johannes Gutenberg invented the movable printing press in 1470, this allowed the Mass texts to become standardized and published universally. In 1474, the first *Missale Romanum* (Roman Missal) was printed in Latin and the texts contained in this volume evolved over the five ensuing centuries.

Because the amount of scripture proclaimed at Mass increased following the Second Vatican Council (1962–1965), the *Missale Romanum* (Roman Missal) was divided into two separate books: *The Lectionary for Mass* (four volumes of Sacred Scripture) and *The Sacramentary* (prayers, chants, and instructions [rubrics] for the celebration of the Mass). The Lectionary texts for the dioceses of the United States were



revised in 1998 and are currently used in the liturgy. The texts that are found in the current edition of *The Sacramentary* have been retranslated and will eventually be used in English-speaking countries. With this translation, the name of the book will change from *The Sacramentary* to *The Roman Missal*, a translation of the Latin title, *Missale Romanum*.

All of the prayers we say in English have corresponding Latin texts. After the Second Vatican Council, the Latin texts were translated into the vernacular, or common language, of particular regions. The first English translation of *The Roman Missal* was completed quickly in 1969. It aimed for a “spirit” of the texts rather than an exact literal translation of the Latin words.

A second revision of these texts occurred in 1975. In 2001, the Congregation for Divine Worship and the Discipline of the Sacraments, the liturgical commission in Rome, issued a document outlining the methodology and process for translating liturgical texts into vernacular languages. This document, *Liturgiam authenticam*, called for a more literal translation of the original Latin, and so a group of scholars, poets, and theologians convened and worked painstakingly on providing a third English translation. The Congregation for Divine Worship and the Discipline of the Sacraments announced *recognitio* on April 30, 2010. These texts will be implemented on November 27, 2011, the First Sunday of Advent.

When the translation is used, you will notice slight changes in the prayers we hear and say at Mass. For example, we will soon respond, “And with your spirit” to “The Lord be with you.” Being faithful to the original Latin prayers will enhance the meaning of the texts. They will be more poetic, and there will be a more obvious connection to the scriptural roots of our prayers. There is an old axiom, *lex orandi, lex credendi*—that is “the law of prayer is the law of faith” or “that which we pray is that which we believe.” This is why the prayers of the Church are so important and why the Church has initiated the process of revising the English translation. The words of our prayers are what we believe as a Church and form us as the body of Christ. For more information about *The Roman Missal*, please visit this Web site: [www.RevisedRomanMissal.org](http://www.RevisedRomanMissal.org).

# Why Was The Roman Missal Revised?

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For several years, bishops in English-speaking countries have been working together to produce a unified translation of the texts of the Mass. The book used by the priest at Eucharistic liturgies is officially now to be called the *Roman Missal*. We have been calling that “red book” The *Sacramentary*. The *Roman Missal* contains all of the prayers of the Eucharistic liturgy. The Order of Mass, prayers for a feast day, Solemn Blessings and Eucharistic Prayers are all found in the *Roman Missal*.



The current prayer texts with which we are familiar are from the Missal of Pope Paul VI. At the Second Vatican Council, it was decided that liturgical texts could be prayed officially in vernacular languages (the language of the people: English, Italian, etc.). This approval came in November of 1963, when the Council issued the *Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy*. This document provides the vision for all subsequent liturgical reforms in the Roman Catholic Church. The bishops, then, reformed the liturgical books for the sacraments, including the Eucharist, or Mass. The result was the 1969 Missal of Paul VI, a fully revised book first published in Latin. The *Missal* was then translated into vernacular languages around the world. In 1974, the U.S. edition of the *Sacramentary* was approved by the Holy See; however, only a year later an “updated” Latin edition was printed in Rome, modifying prayers and rubrics (instructions) that needed fixing. It was not until 1985 that the next update for the English *Sacramentary* in the U.S. was approved.

In 2000, to commemorate the new millennium and the Jubilee Year, Blessed Pope John Paul II called for a third edition of the *Roman Missal*, which was then published in 2002. He wanted to include revised prayers that dated back to our early Church Fathers and included many updates since the Second Vatican Council. Many of these updates include additions to the liturgical calendar with saints that have been canonized; John Paul II canonized an amazing 482 during his pontificate! As with all liturgical books, this edition of the *Roman Missal* was first published in Latin. Thus, national bishops’ conferences have been working to translate the Missal in the local languages of the people.

One reason for this revised translation is obviously the additions to the Missal. The second is due to new rules for translating liturgical texts. The document *Liturgiam authenticam (Fifth Instruction for the Right Implementation of the Constitution)*, from the Holy See, called for a more literal

translation of the Latin. A considerable amount of time has been spent trying to accurately translate the Latin texts into English in a literal manner which will keep intact the structure, order and vocabulary of the Latin language. At first this may seem awkward (especially the priest’s prayers), but if we lend our ears to really comprehend these prayers, they are quite beautiful and poetic. In essence, the translators were to maintain the poetry of the Latin

language in the revised liturgical language that we will now hear.

After approving the revised English translation of the *Roman Missal*, the bishops of the English-speaking countries (there are 11) sent the texts to Rome for review. Once reviewed, the translation was given *recognitio*—the Latin term for “recognizing” the translation or approving it. After proofing the text, the Bishops back here in the U.S. sent the text to publishers with the adaptations for the U.S. The publishers had to typeset and send proofs to the Bishops’ Committee on Divine Worship for final approval before printing the *Roman Missal*. That process took about a year because of the enormous amount of texts included in the *Missal*. The new edition ships to parishes on October 1.

As we waited for the approval of all of the prayers of the Mass, it allowed time for the composition of music for the *Gloria*, the Holy, Holy; and other parts of the Order of Mass. It also provided time for pastoral leadership to understand the reasons for the revisions and to begin educating their Assemblies. In this time between the implementation of the revised edition of *The Roman Missal* and implementation, parishes will continue to educate.

As our parish studies the revised translation, you will see that many of the priest’s and some of the people’s parts have changed. For example, when the Presider proclaims, “The Lord be with you,” the people will reply, “And with your spirit.” That response is the direct translation of 2 Timothy 4:22 and a reminder to the priest of the spirit that he received at ordination and that we, the people, assure him that he has the assistance of God’s spirit from his ordination in order to perform the prophetic function of the Church. Other revisions, too, will help us relate the prayers of the Mass to Scripture. The response to the Lamb of God, for example, alludes the Centurion’s request that his servant be healed (Matthew 8:8 and Luke 7:6 “*Lord, I am not worthy that you should enter under my roof, but only say the word and my soul shall be healed.*”).

*The revised prayers of the Mass will be implemented on the First Sunday of Advent, November 27, 2011.*