

THE NEW ROMAN MISSAL - A SENSE OF THE SACRED

It would probably be what the British call “bloody obvious” to say that we live in a rather casual society. When I started going to the opera over forty years ago it would have been unthinkable for a man to show up in anything but a suit and tie – well maybe a turtleneck in the 70’s. Within the last decade, suits and ties became the exception rather than the rule, with sweats sadly making an occasional appearance. But formality isn’t a bad thing – unless it veers off into pretension – and even the Cubs were decked out in suits and ties when they visited the White House this past week.

The same “sense of place” also applied to church when many of us “of a certain age” were growing up. Dresses, hats, suits & ties – one’s “Sunday best” – were expected and accepted as the norm. Sometimes, to be sure, the expectation was a bit silly when, for example, my mother would decide to stop into church for a “visit” on her way home from work only to realize that she had no head covering. The solution, of course, was a hankie or even a Kleenex, bobby-pinned to her hair. But even that somewhat silly solution revealed a deep awareness that entering into the sacred space of the church demanded something different, something special, because the church was a place like nowhere else. Today, that’s not always the case.

One of the values the English translation of the *New Roman Missal* can help us appreciate and honor is a *sense of the sacred*: sacred space, sacred speech, sacred time. The church is a place like nowhere else. Worship is different from anything else we do in life. If we approach the Mass as we would a movie or a ball game, something is missing. It’s simply a fact that liturgy has its own unique requirements in terms of space and speech and time, and the language of the new translation we began using over five years ago invites us to recognize the sacred essence of the liturgy.

So what makes a particular space *sacred*? Sometimes our own actions can make even an ordinary space sacred. At the end of the summer every year at St. John Fisher, we celebrated the Sunday noon Mass in a local park, with a parish picnic following. Now that park was anything but a sacred space on Friday and Saturday nights when the local teens would leave dozens of beer bottles behind in the bushes. But on one Sunday a year, our common prayer transformed one corner of that park into sacred space. The church, however, is sacred space even before we arrive. It is consecrated – not simply blessed – to be a place of worship. Its sacredness is activated, if you will, by our presence and prayerful activity. But even when we aren’t present there as a worshipping community, the Blessed Sacrament is present along with all the other sacred objects and images which surround and support our prayer. And once we recognize a space as *sacred*, the question arises: “how do we behave in that space?” I’ll invite you to consider the answer to that question next week.

Fr. Bob