

THE NEW ROMAN MISSAL - THE ROAD FROM LATIN TO ENGLISH

Something that some Catholics complain about from time to time is the perception that Church leadership seem to treat the members of the Church like children, failing to respect the laity as intelligent, capable people. It's true that pronouncements from "on high" can sometimes come across that way – though thankfully, far less often now with the gift of Pope Francis in our lives. But the preparation of the English translation of the *New Roman Missal* was not one of those times. In fact, it turns out that the post-Vatican II "progressive" bishops were the ones who chose to treat us a bit like children as they directed the preparation of the 1969 Latin-to-English translation of the Mass with which we were familiar for over forty years.

Back in the mid-60's, when the English-speaking Bishops' conferences of the world created ICEL, the International Commission on English in the Liturgy, they gave them this mandate: translate the new (Latin) Mass of Vatican II into English texts that can be understood by *people of little education* or by *children* (emphasis mine). In colloquial terms, it might be fair to say that the bishops told the commission to "dumb it down" for us poor, theologically unsophisticated Catholics. Rather than giving the laity of the Church credit for being able to understand, appreciate and learn a new Mass that contained some very rich poetry and complex theological expressions, the bishops requested a watered-down translation of the new Latin texts.

Now if you recall what I wrote a couple of weeks ago, those "new" prayers for the Mass were derived from some of the oldest liturgical texts – mostly in Greek, not Latin – dating back to the third century. The Fathers of Vatican II actually wanted to scrape away the barnacles of centuries, especially the medieval Latin ones, and restore to us the rich poetic images which those early Christian communities experienced in their common prayer just a few centuries after Jesus' ministry. Unfortunately, the English-speaking bishops apparently didn't think 20th century Catholics could handle that.

The *New Roman Missal*, then, wasn't an attempt to make us more Roman or the first step on a road back to praying in Latin which would be appallingly regressive, but rather a step forward in terms of the Bishops' respect for our ability to understand, appreciate and learn prayers for the Mass that are poetically and theologically rich. Now it **is** true that some of the words and expressions we now say and hear can sound a bit odd or stilted – *oblation* in place of *sacrifice*, *chalice* rather than *cup*, the tongue-twisting *consubstantial* instead of *one in being* with the Father, or the perhaps the most challenging of all even after five years for those who are infrequent church-goers: *and with your spirit*. But there are some very good theological reasons for those changes as well as some good poetic reasons for the re-translated Eucharistic and presidential prayers prayed by the priest-president. That's what we'll consider in the coming weeks.

Next week: *A Sense of the Sacred*.

Fr. Bob