

Welcoming the New Roman Missal



History of the Liturgical Books Part II: Vatican II to the Present

After the Council of Trent (1548-1563), our liturgical books remained relatively unchanged for 400 years. Some papal initiatives, including the reform of Holy Week in the 1950s, created some modest changes to texts and the liturgical calendar. But when Pope John XXIII called for the 21st ecumenical council, he wanted an *aggiornamento* ("a re-awakening" "fresh air") so that the Church would continue to be an instrument of grace in the midst of a modern world.

One of the hallmarks of Vatican II was scholarship! Experts in liturgical and Church history called *periti* advised the bishops of the world before, during, and after their four sessions. In all, 16 documents were promulgated by the Council. The very first document of those was passed on December 4, 1963 – “*Sacrosanctum Consilium*, the Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy.” In this magnificent treatise on the theology of worship and the central role of liturgy in the life of the Church, the bishops wrote:

In order that the Christian people may more surely derive an abundance of graces from the liturgy, the Church desires to undertake with great care a general reform of the liturgy itself... In this reform both texts and rites should be drawn up so that they may express more clearly the holy things they signify and that the Christian people, as far as possible, are able to understand them with ease and to take part in the rites fully and actively, as befits a community (SC 21).

The Council decreed that several key principles would guide the reform of our official books. The primary goal would be the full, conscious and active participation of the people – their right and duty by reason of their baptism. The rites would be “marked by noble simplicity; ...short, clear and unencumbered by useless repetitions; ... written within the people’s powers of comprehension and as a rule not require much explanation” (SC 34). Toward that end, while Latin was to be preserved, the Mass and sacraments, once again, would be celebrated in the language of the people and acclamations and dialogues would increase the speaking role of the assembly. The use of sacred Scripture would be greatly expanded and the Word would be integral to all liturgical celebrations.

While “bearing witness to unbroken tradition” and preserving ancient texts, the rites would provide richer options to address a variety of pastoral needs and circumstances. For example, the Council called for the restoration of the ancient catechumenate process – what you now experience as the *Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults* (RCIA). The Order of Mass would be streamlined by eliminating various devotional practices that had crept into our liturgy over the centuries. Now it more closely resembles the practices of the Early Church and allows us to focus on the paschal mystery of Christ.

In the reform of the Liturgical Year, the Church restored greater prominence to the Sacred Triduum and to Sunday as the primordial feast. Saints from every era and continent were recognized in the reformed calendar.

All of this required new books! The texts were created by a committee of experts (*Consilium*) and were released in Latin. Then, each conference of bishops had authority to translate them into their own language groups.

The *Roman Ritual* (our book of rites) was published in separate volumes containing the reformed texts for the *Rite of Baptism for Children*, *Rite of Penance*, *Rite of Marriage*, the *Book of Blessings*, etc.

The *Roman Missal* (our book for the celebration of Mass) was, once again, printed as separate books for very practical reasons – a *Sacramentary* that contained the prayers; the *Lectionary* that contained the readings, the *Book of Gospels*, etc. The first edition came out in 1969 and was fully translated into English by 1974. A “second edition” (with its slight modifications) was promulgated in 1975 and the English translation of it appeared in 1985 (this is our current text). In 2000, Pope John Paul II, issued a “third typical edition” –not much changed, but many more saints had been canonized. This edition needed to be translated into English and our bishops have been carefully working on that for over ten years.

It will be used in the dioceses of the U.S. on the First Sunday of Advent 2011.

The *Roman Pontifical* (which contains the rites a bishop uses) and the *Liturgy of the Hours* (or Divine Office) also underwent reform with careful fidelity to ancient texts and practices.

In 2,000 years of development, our liturgy has always been a “living” liturgy. Early extemporaneous texts differed from place to place, from presider to presider. Modern liturgical books – based upon some of those same ancient texts – are shared with a universal Church. But from ancient scrolls to hardbound texts our goal has been the same – to give glory to God and to express our thanks for the great gift of our redemption!

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