

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 called the Roman Missal. We have been calling that “red book” the Sacramentary; however, in the future it will be called the Roman Missal. 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. 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 though published in Latin. Subsequently, the missal was translated into vernacular languages around the world.

In 2000, to commemorate the new millennium, Pope John Paul II established a third edition of the Roman Missal. This edition includes more ancient prayers and saints’ days that have been established since the publication of the Missal of Pope Paul VI. 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 norms 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.

After approving the revised English translation of the Roman Missal, the English-speaking Bishops’ conferences sent the texts to the Congregation for Divine Worship and Discipline of the Sacraments for review. Once reviewed, the translation is submitted to the Holy See for *recognitio*. Basically, *recognitio* is the Latin term for “recognizing” the translation. After this recognition is given, the Bishops’ Committee on Divine Worship determines the

changes the Congregation has made to the translation. It is then that the text can be sent to publishers. The publishers will have to typeset and send proofs to the Bishops’ Committee on Divine Worship for final approval before printing the Roman Missal. This process will take more than a year because of the enormous amount of texts included in the Roman Missal.

Although the Holy See approved some of the texts in 2008, they were not to be used at Mass until Rome had given *recognitio* to the entire translation and provided an implementation date. The wait for the approval of all of the prayers of the Mass allowed time for the composition of music for the Gloria, the Sanctus, 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 *recognitio* of the revised Roman Missal and the implementation, parishes will continue to educate their communities.

As your parish studies the revised translation, you will see that many of the priest’s and people’s parts have changed. For example, when the priest 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. Other revisions, too, will help assemblies relate the prayers of the Mass to scripture. The response to the Lamb of God, for example, clearly alludes to the centurion’s request that his servant be healed (see Matthew 8:8 and Luke 7:6).

You may find it helpful to review the information on the Roman Missal at www.RevisedRomanMissal.org.

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