

October 11, 2010

Dearest Parishioners,

**Part I: A History of the English “Roman Missal” – the Prayer Book of the Roman Rite Mass**

Peace in the Lord. Forty-eight years ago today, one of the most important events in Church history since the 16<sup>th</sup> century occurred – the opening of the Second Vatican Ecumenical Council by Blessed John XXIII (the pope of the time). After four major sessions, the Council would conclude on December 8, 1965 under the leadership of Pope Paul VI. Beginning with the Apostles in Jerusalem in 49 A.D. (cf. Acts 15:1-35) and throughout the centuries, the Pope and bishops have met in “council” – an assembly to discuss very important issues. An “ecumenical” council means that it was a **universal gathering of bishops** representing dioceses from throughout the world. The Second Vatican Ecumenical Council (a.k.a. – Vatican Council II or simply “Vatican II”) was the largest and latest council to occur as well as the second one to take place at the Vatican (the first one at the Vatican was in 1869-70).

Of all the issues discussed at Vatican II, the first undertaken (and debated) was the revision of the Church’s liturgy. Already since the 1800’s Church scholars have been examining (and re-discovering) the ancient liturgical rituals of the Church in their great variety. When Vatican II opened in 1962, decades of studies have paved the way of the Council discussions. A second reality was also considered: our world – our modern world – is changing rapidly with global consequences. Thus the main question of the “Council Fathers” (the bishops assembled at the council) as well as the *periti* (the experts and scholars whom the bishops consulted) was: “How should the Church (in the richness of its various Rites) celebrate the Liturgy for the world of today; yet, at the same time, be anchored in its rich tradition of the past?” This was, indeed, a rich yet difficult topic to tackle.

As a result of the discussions and deliberations, the **first** of sixteen documents of Vatican II was issued – *Sacrosanctum Concilium*, “The Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy.” Since it was a “Constitution” (as opposed to a “Decree” or “Declaration” document), it was a foundational document of upmost importance. *Sacrosanctum Concilium* was issued on December 4, 1963.

Such an undertaking as important and global as Vatican II is taking years to implement fruitfully – even in the context of our modern communications. Thus, even during the Council itself and ever since, ways of implementing *Sacrosanctum Concilium* faithfully and fruitfully are being carried out *and perfected* in the Church. One must remember, *Sacrosanctum Concilium* was a constitution that affected the **entire Church** in all its Rites. The Roman Rite (our parish rite) is only one of dozens! Thus revision of the Church’s liturgy initiated at Vatican II covers all the twenty-plus Rites of the Church: Byzantine, Ruthenian, Maronite, Syro-Malabar, Coptic, Chaldean, etc.). Not only that! The liturgical rites of the Church have to be translated *effectively and fruitfully* into *dozens of major world languages* as well as in other languages and dialects! This is, indeed, an ongoing, herculean task!

**This leads us to the present situation of the English speaking Church** – a *third edition of the translation* of the Roman Missal into the English language is being implemented. Like solid books that last over time, subsequent editions come into existence. Other languages like French, Spanish, German, etc. are following their own time-line and dynamics. Furthermore, the new

revision affects the *English translation of the Roman Missal*; thus, not only the United States of America, but other countries are affected by the present translation (e.g., the United Kingdom, Ireland, Canada, Nigeria, the Philippines, South Africa, Australia, etc.). Finally, the present edition concerns *only the Roman Missal* – the Missal that governs the celebration of the Mass in the Roman Rite (not Coptic, Maronite, Byzantine, etc.).

To conclude, I liken the present translation of the Roman Missal to my brother-in-law's 1969 SS Camaro – it is still essentially the same car, but it needed a recent major overhaul. The structure of the Mass will remain essentially the same, but some fine touches are being done. This means that the Mass prayers and responses that we are accustomed to will be revised with *slightly different wording*. To put it succinctly: ***New Words: A Deeper Meaning, but the Same Mass.***

My dear parishioners, the implementation of the third edition of the Roman Missal will not take place until **the first Sunday of Advent of 2011**. Thus, there is still time to prepare ourselves. For *both* the clergy and lay people, we will have to be trained in the new texts and wording. On the parish level, the training will occur throughout 2011 through our bulletin, from the pulpit, letters to parishioners, pamphlets, training sessions, the parish website, etc. On your own, you can begin informing yourself of the current revisions by accessing the following internet addresses: [www.usccb.org/romanmissal](http://www.usccb.org/romanmissal) or [www.fdlc.org](http://www.fdlc.org).

As we move forward, may we grow in the richness of the Holy Mass – the same Mass celebrated since the Last Supper and Calvary in all its variety, richness, and languages throughout the centuries. May Jesus, whom we encounter in both Word and in the Most Blessed Sacrament, unite us as one family of faith on the road to our Father in heaven.

Rev. Matthew R. Weber

Pastor