

From the Office of Liturgy and Music

Welcoming the

English Translation of the

Roman Missal
THIRD EDITION

Final Article: Sung Liturgy...

As It Was In The Beginning, Is Now, And Ever Shall Be.

Over the past three months, we have been learning the new English translation of the *Roman Missal, Third Edition* and on the First Sunday of Advent, we finally implemented the entire new Missal. As we were learning the new translation, you probably noticed that whether we were learning the longer prayers of the Mass Ordinary (such as the Gloria, Creed, Sanctus, Memorial Acclamation), or the shorter dialogues (such as the Apostolic Greeting, Gospel Dialogue, Orate Fratres, Rite of Peace, Invitation to Communion), we sang them. The Third Edition of the Roman Missal, more so than previous editions of the Missal, promotes what has always been the ideal of the Roman liturgy: a sung liturgy.

In the beginning, the liturgy was sung. In the earliest centuries of the Church, the priest would chant, “The Lord be with you” and the assembly would respond by chanting, “And with your spirit.” The deacon would chant, “Go forth you are sent” and the assembly would respond by chanting, “Thanks be to God.” It would have been unthinkable to speak these dialogues and the other dialogues of the liturgy. It would be like speaking the song *Happy Birthday To You* or *For He’s A Jolly Good Fellow*; it just would not make sense.

This ideal of a sung liturgy remained the common practice in the Eastern Catholic and Orthodox Churches to this day. Sadly, in the West, the ideal of a sung liturgy was largely lost. As monasteries began ordaining more and more monks to the priesthood at the turn of the first millennium, each monk wanted to celebrate his own Mass and so the “private Mass” or “low Mass” was born, an entirely spoken Mass. This style of a spoken liturgy in Latin, maybe with a few vernacular hymns thrown in, became the norm in most communities and parishes into the 1960’s.

During the Second Vatican Council, (1962-1965), four Church Constitutions were promulgated, the first being *The Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy* in 1963. These four constitutions hold the highest authority in the Church (similar to our United States Constitution holding the highest authority in this country). No person can change a church Constitution, not even the Pope. The *Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy* upholds and promotes the ideal of a sung liturgy as does every Church document on music and liturgy that has followed to this very day, including our new Missal.

When Church documents speak of “sung liturgy” or “singing the liturgy,” it is quite different from “singing at the liturgy” which is what one still experiences at most parishes. “Singing at the liturgy” refers to merely singing hymns or songs during the entrance, offertory and Communion processions and maybe a few parts of the Mass Ordinary, such as the Kyrie, Gloria, Sanctus or Agnus Dei. “Singing the liturgy” or “sung liturgy,” on the other hand, first and foremost means chanting the dialogues: those prayers which are sung by the priest or deacon with the assembly responding (such as “The Lord be with you...And with your spirit”) as well as singing the entire Mass Ordinary, including the Creed. “Singing the liturgy” also requires that the celebrant chants the orations (the opening prayer, the prayer over the gifts, the prayer after Communion), the Eucharistic Prayer and the blessing and dismissal. Finally, an authentically “sung liturgy” does NOT use hymns or songs during the three processions of the Mass (entrance, offertory, Communion). For every Sunday in the liturgical year, an antiphon (a scriptural verse set to music) and psalm is appointed to be sung during each of these three processions. Singing these antiphons and psalms are an important part of a “sung liturgy” (and should not be replaced by hymns or songs). Including the responsorial psalm then, four psalms are appointed to be sung during Mass. The book of Psalms has always been the official songbook of God’s people. When we sing psalms and antiphons, the Word of God is placed on our lips, enters into our hearts and hopefully shapes our actions. The Word is made incarnate, made flesh in Christ’s body: us, the Church, here and now in our midst.

We should be proud as a parish that we have embraced and implemented the ideal of a sung liturgy as we learned the new translation of the Roman Missal (not many parishes can claim that!). As I conclude this article series, I would like to thank the whole community of Good Shepherd Parish, both lay and ordained members, for welcoming the new Missal with such openness and excitement, prayerfulness and patience, sophistication and grace.

Please remember you can still access this entire article series on our website: goodshepherdparish.net.

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