

From the Office of Liturgy and Music

Welcoming the

English Translation of the

Roman Missal

THIRD EDITION

Part 4: The Art of Translating the Roman Missal

(If you missed parts one, two or three of this column, they are now available on our website at www.goodshepherdparish.net). In last week's column, we looked at the Roman Missal, the book containing the prayers, acclamations and dialogues which both the priest and assembly sing and speak at Mass. All editions of the Missal are

first published in Latin and then translated into the languages of Catholics around the world. This week we will look at the art of translation and why the third edition of the Missal (which we will begin using on November 27) was translated from Latin to English using a new method of translation. Anyone who has studied a foreign language knows that language is more than just words. To learn and especially to speak a language well, one has to learn the form of the language including the grammar, the sentence structure, the syntax, the accents, the slang: all of which contribute greatly to the beauty of the language. A good translation must convey both this beauty shaped by the form as well as the original meaning. The first two editions of the Roman Missal (including the one we currently use at Mass) were translated from Latin to English in the 1970s with a method of translation known as *dynamic equivalency*. Using dynamic equivalency, translators would discern the meaning of the Latin texts (most of the texts from the first millennium of Christianity) and translate them into English in a way the translators believed the original author would speak the texts in modern English if he/she was alive today. By using dynamic equivalency, the translator produces more of a re-imagination of the text rather than a precise translation, often adding to or taking away from the meaning of the original author and usually not maintaining the beauty or form of the Latin. When the Third Edition of the Missal was translated, a new method called *formal equivalency* was used. Formal equivalency translates the Latin texts of the Missal more precisely by attempting to maintain the original beauty (form) and meaning of the Latin in the best way possible. This often creates English translations which sound quite different from how we would normally speak in "everyday life" since Latin is written and spoken with a different form and sentence structure than English. It is important to remember that the liturgy is something different and more unique than anything else we do. The language of "everyday life" does not fit well into the unique nature of the liturgy. In the liturgy, through the work of the Spirit, we join in the prayer of the Son to the Father and enter into a unique way of speaking and praying. By using formal equivalency to translate the Third Edition of the Missal, many of the prayers which we sing and speak during Mass have been retranslated to recapture the beauty and original meaning of the Latin texts, often changing the words we currently use. Over the next few weeks we will look at each part of the Mass that has been retranslated and reflect on how the new translation does indeed better express what we believe in a more beautiful way. Below is the Opening Prayer for the Third Sunday of Lent, which demonstrates well the difference between the translation methods of dynamic and formal equivalency. Keep in mind that both translations of this prayer came from the same original Latin prayer, with the 1973 translation using dynamic equivalency and the 2010 translation using formal equivalency to translate the prayer into English. Take some time to meditate on these texts and see if you can find meaning and beauty in the new translation which was lost in the 1973 translation.

1973 Translation (Dynamic Equivalency)

Father, you have taught us
to overcome our sins
by prayer, fasting, and works of mercy.
When we are discouraged by our weakness,
give us confidence in your love.

2010 Translation (Formal Equivalency)

O God, author of every mercy
and of all goodness,
who in fasting, prayer and almsgiving
have shown us a remedy for sin,
look graciously on this
confession of our lowliness,
that we,
who are bowed down by our conscience,
may always be lifted up by your mercy.

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