

## **HAVE YOU HEARD ABOUT THE REVISED ROMAN MISSAL?**

On April 1 of this year the Canadian Council of Catholic Bishops announced that the revised English-language edition of the Roman Missal will be implemented in Canada on the First Sunday of Advent, November 27, 2011. Many of the Mass texts that are spoken or sung by the assembly will change. The structure of the Mass, though, will remain as before. Read below some historical background on the Missal, its past revisions, and a comparison of some of the current and revised texts.

### **1. What is the Roman Missal?**

The Roman Missal is the ritual text for the celebration of Mass in the Roman Catholic Church. It is written in Latin under the title of *Misale Romanum*. The text is then translated into the vernacular\* for use in local churches. The use of a common book ensures that we are all in unity with the Roman Catholic Church throughout the world. Through this unity we can come to know Christ more clearly through our prayer of the Mass.

\*vernacular – native language of the people of a particular country.

---

### **2. What is found in the Roman Missal?**

The Roman Missal contains the following:

- A. GIRM – the General Instruction of the Roman Missal. This document provides details on how the Mass is celebrated.
- B. RUBRICS. Rubrics are particular directions to the priest, ministers and people on what to do at a specific part in the Mass. They are called rubrics because they are presented in red ink; the word ‘rubric’ is the Latin for ‘red’.

- C. TEXT. This includes all the prayers and responses spoken during Mass – everything we say and hear.

---

### **3. Is the Roman Missal the large red book currently used by the priest on the altar?**

Not quite. This red book is currently called a *Sacramentary*. It contains all the prayers of the Mass. This includes the prayers of both the priest and the assembly. The *Lectionary* is the large book which is currently carried in the entrance procession and placed on the lectern/ambo. Both the Sunday edition (which is red) and the weekday edition (which is green) contain all the scriptural readings of the Mass, including the First and Second Reading, the Responsorial Psalm and the Gospel. Together, these two books – the Sacramentary and the Lectionary – make up the *Roman Missal*. The current revision affects the Sacramentary.

---

### **4. How did the Roman Missal originate?**

In the early Christian Church, many of the prayers that were said at Eucharist were memorized and handed down orally. Eventually the prayers were collected and

written down by scribes. These books were referred to as sacramentaries (book of sacraments). Scripture readings were recorded in other books and the Psalms were written in a book called the *Psalter*.

Throughout the ages, as these manuscripts were passed down, slight modifications and additions were made.

Eventually all the chants, prayers, instructions and scriptures were organized into one book called the *Missale Plenum* (complete missal). The first book bearing the name *Missale Romanum* appeared in 1474. Following the Council of Trent in 1570, Pope Pius V promulgated\* an edition of the *Missale Romanum* that was to be in obligatory use throughout the Latin Church. It was written in Latin and the texts contained in it continued to evolve over the next five centuries.

\*promulgate – put into effect by official proclamation

---

## 5. How has the Roman Missal changed in recent history?

Since the Second Vatican Council ended on December 8, 1965, there have been three typical editions\* of the Roman Missal in Latin.

In 1969, the First Edition (editio typica) of the Roman Missal was published. It was translated into the vernacular throughout the world. In 1975, the Second Edition was issued. It was more complete than the first edition. In 2002, Pope John Paul II promulgated the Third Edition of the Roman Missal. It is this third edition that is now

being translated by English-speaking countries throughout the world.

\* typical edition – the official Latin text that must be used when translating the Missal into other languages.

---

## 6. Why do we need a revised English translation?

There are several reasons for a revised translation:

- Following the Second Vatican Council, a revised Latin edition of the Missal was written. The process of translating this Missal into English was an enormous task, but parishes were anxious to begin celebrating Mass in the vernacular. Therefore, the process of translation was done very quickly, and was not necessarily the best translation. It was always meant to be temporary. A revised translation will produce a better translation.
- After the year 2000, Pope John Paul II promulgated a third edition of the Roman Missal in Latin. This was necessary because a number of new prayers for the Mass had been written. Also, because he had canonized more than 480 saints, these prayers needed to be included as well. Therefore, this third edition of the Missal contained many new texts that needed to be translated into English.

---

## 7. Why a translation corresponding more precisely to the original Latin?

A more exact translation from Latin into English is important for several reasons:

- The language of this revised translation will be more similar to that which we hear in Scriptures. Thus, connections between the Scriptures and the Mass texts will be easier to make.
- Many of the original phrases used in Latin were altered or lost in the English translations. The revised English translation will bring us closer to the translations used by many other cultural and language groups and will connect us linguistically\* to other Catholics throughout the world.
- The English versions of many of our liturgical texts are used as the base language by a number of other countries to guide their own translations. Therefore, it is important that the English translation be as precise and as close to the original as possible.
- Even in this modern technological age, words are important. During liturgical celebrations, we should pray what we believe, and believe what we pray. In order to do this, translations need to be authentic and accurate.

\* linguistic – relating to language

---

## 8. Who has been doing the work involved in translating the Roman Missal from Latin to English?

Many different groups of people are involved in the translation which is one of the reasons it has taken so long. The **ICEL**

(International Committee on English in the Liturgy) is the major body whose job is to prepare English translations of liturgical texts on behalf of the Conferences of Bishops that are full members of the Commission: Australia, Canada, England and Wales, India, Ireland, New Zealand, Pakistan, Philippines, Scotland, South Africa and the United States.

The ICEL staff and bishops work together to produce a first draft of the Missal which is then sent to each Conference of Bishops. These drafts are called green books. The bishops respond with comments and suggestions to the ICEL. A second draft is issued, which is called the grey book. It is again sent to the Conferences of Bishops for approval. This is then sent to the Vatican for final approval. Once the document reaches the Vatican, it is scrutinized by the Congregation of Divine Worship and the Discipline of the Sacraments. They give their approval which is called *recognitio* and grant permission for the use of the document.

---

## 9. How will the implementation of the revised Missal be carried out?

Before use of the revised Roman Missal becomes mandatory, dioceses will need to prepare parishes for implementation. Liturgical books, such as the Sacramentary, will need to be replaced. Participation aids, such as missalettes and music aids, will need to be replaced and/or revised. Priests will need to learn new texts. The music ministers and the congregation will need to learn new musical settings for the parts of the Mass. Parishioners will need to learn the new prayers and responses.

This will all take time so that all involved will truly understand and appreciate the revisions that have occurred. As part of the preparation for the implementation of the Missal, the Bishops of Canada will be issuing catechetical resources to assist Canadian Catholics in preparing for the revised translation. These resources are being prepared by the CCCB English Sector Commission for Liturgy and the Sacraments, with the assistance of the Sector's National Liturgy Office.

---

**10. What is a Book of Gospels? Does Canada have such a book?**

A book of Gospels is a book containing only Gospel readings. Canada does not currently have a published Book of Gospels. However, it is anticipated that in the future a Book of Gospels will be published.

You may see in some parishes a Book of Gospels being used; this is probably an edition from the United States.

*Adapted and revised from the Diocese of Antigonish.  
Diocese of Charlottetown, 2011*