

Ready or Not, Here it Comes

More years ago than I care to admit, I was an altar server. At that time, in order to be an altar server, you first had to be approved by our teacher Sister Marie Gregory. For Sister to approve a prospective server, you had to be able to recite all your prayers in Latin. Of course, you also needed to know when to ring the bells and go get the paten so the priest could distribute communion to the faithful kneeling at the communion rail. As result of Vatican Council II, all that changed.

The priest no longer had his back to the people but rather, he now faced the people. The altar was turned around so the people could see what was happening. The communion rail was removed. And more importantly, all the prayers were now in English, and were a lot easier to understand and to memorize. Great changes.



On November 26th, the 1st Sunday of Advent, the Mass as we know it is going to undergo another change. But, it's not going to be the great changes we experienced over 40 years ago as result of the Vatican Council.

Rather, many of the prayers we are used to saying during Mass are going to change a bit. We will begin using the new translation of the Roman Missal.

When I first heard that changes were coming, I was a bit apprehensive and worried. My initial reaction was: I hope we are not going backwards. I am pleased to tell you, we are not.

Our prayers will now be more directly in line with those prayers offered by the ancient Church fathers, both in their meaning and theology.

Now you ask *"What is the Roman missal?"*

Quite simply, it is the ritual text used for the celebration of the Mass, the central focus of our liturgical worship. In the early centuries of the church, there were no books containing prescribed liturgical prayers, text, or other instructions.

Because the faith of the church was, and still is, articulated liturgical prayer, there was a need for consistency and authenticity in the words used in the celebration of the liturgy. The first true liturgical books which could be called Missals were found in monasteries beginning around the 12th and 13th centuries. These early missals were collections of the prayers that had been formulated and prayed by the ancient Church Fathers as the Mass itself began to evolve.

The first book bearing the name of Roman Missal appeared in 1474, but it was not until after the Council of Trent that Pope Pius V in 1570 promulgated a Missal that was obligatory in its' use throughout the Latin church. This marked the first official attempt at uniformity in the celebration of the Mass in the history of the church.

Since the 1570 edition, there have been eight new editions of the Roman Missal which have been promulgated by Popes for use in the church.

In response to the Reformation, the church emphasized the Eucharist as Sacrifice and Real Presence as well as the importance of the ministerial priesthood. Because of this, the liturgical participation of the laity receded far into the background. At Mass, prior to Vatican II, the faithful had virtually no significant role.

At the prodding of the Holy Spirit, the 2nd Vatican Council recognized the importance of everyone's participation at mass. Thus, the change in prayers from Latin to the vernacular of the people. We moved away from the formalism that characterized the church's life from the 17th until the 20th century.

The Roman Missal was then translated rather quickly from Latin into English and was first published in 1970. This translation was not only a bit rushed but also reflected the social spirit of the times.

This translation along with the revision issued in 1985 was based on the type of translation called *dynamic equivalency*.

By *dynamic equivalency*, we mean a translation which does not result in the exact words but rather a general informal translation that reflect more of a colloquial or conceptual meaning.

With the dynamic equivalency translation, the Mass shifted slightly towards a somewhat *horizontal platform* with an important focus on the community gathered together, instead of a *vertical focus* of a prayer directed to God. The concept of dynamic equivalency reflects the individualism of the 1960s and 70s

So why should we change the words we pray?

The Mass is our formal worship and it should be more reverent, more vertical, more heaven sent than our normal daily routine.

The first reason for change is the translation we are currently using was never intended to be the final translation. The changes being implemented are there to preserve and to be faithful to the ancient prayers the early Church Fathers offered so many years ago.

Second, this new translation which is called *formal equivalency* simply means “word for word” and provides more pious language than what is currently standard and so familiar. It is a richer language, more formal, more reverent, than the colloquial language now in use. These new translations are not a slavish word for word translation, but ones that retain the content and structure of the Latin whenever possible.

Third, this new translation is more faithful to the Scriptures from which our prayers are taken.

Is there a difference between “My mother said that if I didn’t do chores and get good grades, I’m going to get grounded” (*dynamic equivalency*) and “My mother said that if I did not clean my room and get at least a B in math this week, I couldn’t go to the game on Friday” (*formal equivalency*)? I think so.

Let me give you an example of perhaps one of the most simple prayers we are familiar with and how the new translation enriches its’ theological meaning.

In the Latin it was “Dominus vobis cum”, i.e. “The Lord be with you” and the response was “Et cum Spiritu tuo”. Quite simply, “The Lord be with you” “And with your spirit”.

Today when the priest or deacon says “The Lord be with you” we respond “And also with you”.

The new translation goes back to the more precise meaning of “And with your spirit”.

Why? What does this change through translation by formal equivalency do?

The response “Et cum spiritu tuo” is found in the Liturgies of both East and West, from the earliest days of the Church. One of the first instances of its use is found in the Traditio Apostolica of Saint Hippolytus, composed in Greek around AD 215. This greeting is never used in the Roman Liturgy between a non-ordained person and the gathered assembly.

By greeting the people with the words “The Lord be with you,” the priest expresses his desire that the dynamic activity of God’s spirit be given to the people of God, enabling them to do the work of transforming the world that God has entrusted to them. The expression “et cum spiritu tuo” is only addressed to an ordained minister. Some scholars have suggested that spiritu refers to the gift of the spirit received at ordination.

In their response, the people assure the priest of the same divine assistance of God’s spirit and, more specifically, help for the priest in using the charismatic gifts given to him in ordination and in so doing to fulfill his prophetic function in the Church.