

## **Homily - 4th Catechesis on the Mass: "Why the words are changing"**

As I get older I find change more difficult--there is a certain peace, simplicity and stability that we experience when our life follows consistent patterns and we are surrounded by what is familiar. The Mass for many people is one of these stable, familiar moments in our weekly schedule. And when we come to Mass we know what to do, how to respond, for the Mass is pretty much the same each week. But now, at the beginning of Advent the words to certain parts and prayers of the Mass will be changing. Most of these will only be slight changes, but they will be changes nonetheless, and we will have to learn them and adjust to them.

When I heard why the Church is making these changes, my initial, hesitant reaction quickly turned into enthusiasm and joyful anticipation. Now I'm looking forward to the implementation of these changes in Advent. While change can be difficult, it is worth the struggle if we can see that it is good and for the better.

So why are some of the prayers and words of the Mass changing? The main reason is due to the fact that our English version of the Mass is based upon an older, Latin text that serves as the base text for all countries within the Latin Rite of the Catholic Church. The new English translation will follow this Latin text more literally, resulting in several positive benefits.

One benefit from this is that the meaning conveyed by our new English text will more closely reflect the meaning of translations of other countries, and bring about, therefore, a more unified expression of the faith in our celebrations of the Mass.

A further benefit with a more literal translation of the Latin is that the connection between certain parts of the Mass and their link to Scripture will be more clearly evident. Take for example our response before communion, which is based on the words of the Centurion to Jesus in Mt 8:8. The new response: "Lord I am not worthy that you should enter under my roof, but only say the word and my soul shall be healed," makes the connection to Mt 8:8 easier to see.

A third benefit is a greater precision with regard to certain theological points expressed in the words and prayers of the Mass. The Church is a living Body, joined to Christ, and by the fact that it is living, it is always growing. Our faith is the same as that handed down from Christ to St. Peter and the Apostles--this faith will never change--but our understanding of who God is in His inner mystery and what God has revealed in Christ for our salvation is always growing and deepening. With this deeper understanding comes both the need and challenge to find words in every language that best convey this deeper meaning.

We all know how important words are, and we've all been in situations where we struggle to find the right word to express our inner thoughts and feelings. And this is especially true when we experience things that are very beautiful and profound. We try, but we know how much our words fall short of the experience. We encounter the same

limitations with pictures--they can never come close to capturing the view of an amazing sunset or the colors of fall that we see in the midwest. If this is true with created realities, how much more with regard to the Mystery of God and the plan of redemption? And yet, we must still try to find and use the best words at our disposal.

It is understandable that words and precision would be very important for the Mass, since God is so powerfully present and active in the liturgy by both word and sacrament, and because the liturgy both celebrates and makes present the paschal mystery of Jesus Christ. The words that were approved by the Bishops and the Holy See for our new translation are believed to convey best of all the meaning of the divine mysteries we celebrate.

Here are two examples of what we are talking about: In the beginning of the Mass I greet you with the words “the Lord be with you.” And you respond with: “and also with you.” Starting in Advent your response will be different, you will say instead: “And with your spirit.” Besides being more faithful to the Latin text, and closer to what other countries are saying in their translations, this phrase brings out better an important theological point. Summarizing the meaning from Edward Sri’s book on the Mass and the comments of Fr. Daniel Merz in the Catholic Spirit, by saying “and with your spirit” the people are acknowledging the spirit by which the priest was anointed on the day of ordination for the purpose of leading the people in the sacred action of the Mass--while also acknowledging the unique activity of that same spirit that works through the priest during the sacred liturgy. “And with your spirit” is in one sense a prayer addressed to the deepest part of the priest where he has been configured to Christ by ordination, a prayer that says: ‘be the priest for us now--perform the sacred duties of the one you sacramentally represent.’

A second example is in the penitential rite at the beginning of Mass. One of the options is the prayer that begins with “I confess to almighty God, and to you my brothers and sisters, that I have sinned through my own fault . . .” This last part will change to “that I have greatly sinned.” And further into this confession, after we have acknowledged the 4 areas of sin, our thoughts, our words, what we have done and failed to do, a new part will be added. We will say, while striking our breast: “through my fault, through my fault, through my most grievous fault.” While the changes to this prayer are also more faithful to the Latin text, they also better reflect the deep sense of sorrow for sin that we often see expressed in Sacred Scripture, as in Psalm 51. This change is important for our time, for it will help the Church overcome what has been described as a loss of the sense of the sacred, of the awe of God’s holiness, the loss of the sense of sin and its gravity. A casual attitude has crept into the Church where God, sin, and our growth in holiness are not taken very seriously. God’s mercy is ever present and greater than all sin and evil, but mercy can only help us if we humbly admit and confess that for which it is a remedy.

It is my hope and my prayer that we can look at these changes in a positive light, as a wonderful opportunity, a privileged moment in the Church. How can we see otherwise, when the purpose of the changes is to better assist us in this privileged and powerful

encounter with God at Mass which plunges us into the paschal mystery of Jesus Christ, conforming and elevating our minds and hearts to the mind and heart of God.

God love you,  
Fr. Steven