

The "New" Mass

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For many Catholics of a certain age Sunday November 27th is likely to be remembered as the Day the Music Died. From that date forward the celebration of Mass must employ the language of the revised translation of the Roman Missal. This controversial retooling of the words of worship is being touted by the American bishops for its rather slavish fidelity to the Latin missal that had been in use for four centuries prior to the introduction of a freer, more user-friendly English translation some forty years ago. The revised translation sounds appreciably more formal and stilted, reflecting what the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops' website extols as "a heightened style of English and a grammatical structure that closely follows the Latin text." For example, the declaration that Christ "was incarnate" will replace the simpler "was born." Instead of saying that Christ is "one in being" with the Father, we will assert that He is "consubstantial" (a technical philosophical term that essentially means *one in being*). The moment of consecration of the wine will no longer refer to the *cup* of His blood but will use the antiquated word *chalice* because it is the literal analog of the original Latin word *calix*. When the priest says "The Lord be with you," our response will longer be the more natural sounding "And also with you" but the rather wooden rejoinder "And with your spirit"—again for the sake of verbatim conformity with the Latin. (Given the degree to which church leadership is privileging this dead language as a kind of linguistic straightjacket, one might wrongly assume that it was the language spoken at the Last Supper. Church Latin is old but not that old.)

This country's Catholic bishops, apparently more eager to curry favor with Rome than to articulate widespread pastoral concerns about this issue, have been dutifully cheerleading the gangly "new" prayer forms. Monsignor Joseph DeGrocco, a liturgical expert who writes a column in *The Long Island Catholic*, has been particularly eloquent in promoting the new missal. He recently expressed the hope that the more formal language will restore more of a vertical (i.e., between the believer and God) dimension to worship to correct for what he sees as the post-Vatican II era's overemphasis on the horizontal (fellowship of believers) element. This may explain why the

instructions for priest-celebrants that Bishop William Murphy had Monsignor DeGrocco prepare reminds priests that they are to no longer begin Mass by saying "Good morning" or conclude it with the wish that their congregants have a good day. There is no place for such secular improvisation, no matter how well intentioned. Likewise priests are no longer permitted to give a blessing to infants or toddlers who might accompany their parents down the aisle at communion time since such a gesture, however warm and human, is not sanctioned by the rubrics. They are reminded that it's a communion line--not a *blessing* line.

This tweaking of the Mass is very much in keeping with the pronounced restorationist agenda associated with the pontificate of Pope John Paul II. It derives from the same ecclesiastical mentality that has reintroduced the option of the Tridentine form of the Mass. This four hundred year old iteration of worship is actually said in Latin and has enough liturgical bells and whistles to enchant the cohort of younger Catholic clergy who, although they are only in their thirties and forties, have mysteriously developed a reverential nostalgia for what they are certain were the good old, Father Knows Best, days of the 1950s. It all seems to be part of a concerted effort to roll back much of the spirit of renewal of the Council, especially its less hierarchical, more egalitarian People of God model of church. (Can the reinstallation of communion rails be far behind?)

Given how slowly a 2,000 year old institution engages in course correction, it is likely that we aging types will go to our graves with this new version of the Mass firmly in place. If so, listen closely for a faint murmuring emanating from some caskets during future funeral Masses. You might just hear the words, "And also with you."

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