

Take a ‘white gloves’ approach to new missal

Way back in the 1960s, when all the various changes were taking place in the church after Vatican II, there were countless gatherings explaining the various changes. At one meeting, whenever a question was asked about why a particular change was made, the speaker always replied, “It’s the work of the Holy Spirit.” Having heard this comment over and over, one lady finally raised her hand and said: “Well, the Holy Spirit sure says a lot of things the Holy Ghost never said.”

Change is rarely easy. I always felt great compassion, as a young seminarian and later as a young priest, for the older priests struggling with a new translation for the Mass, and various other changes. Now, ahem, I am one of those older priests struggling with the new translation.

The challenge for me is twofold. Not only am I accustomed to praying the Mass a certain way, which makes any change difficult, but I am also visually challenged by the strokes I had in my eyes years ago that make reading any text more difficult. Fortunately I am confident both of an understanding God and understanding congregations as I learn to pray in a new way.

The new translation is a more formal wording. It’s “high church” in contrast to “casual church.” Vatican II attempted to bring people closer to the church by emphasizing informality over rigidity. The new translation alters that.

Many of us would agree that in losing some of our formalities, we have lost something even more important. We have lost some of our values. So, I believe it was no coincidence, that, as I pondered this question, I received the autobiography of Martha Dugan Hopkins in the mail. Born in the 1920s, she tells her story as a way of remembering the values that informed her life and times. She has titled it, “White Gloves.” Allow me to quote just one paragraph from her book:

“White gloves are beautiful. The color white often depicts innocence, perfection, and tranquility, and during the 1930s, 40s and 50s, the time when I grew up, I was

fortunate to be a part of the “white glove world,” and all that it represented. It was a time of peaceful and polite people; a time when children were not hurried through their youth and their clothing was modest and appropriate. They were children. Women were ladies and did not endeavor beyond motherhood or homemaking. Female CEOs were practically unheard of, or the desire to be one. Cooking, ironing, needle-working, and needle-pointing were home arts that required ladies dedication and study, and, once accomplished, these homemaking virtues were passed down to their daughters. Men acted as gentlemen, used respectful language, and were at home for dinner every night. Families had only one car, and the beltways and superhighways of today were not yet imagined. While we did not “enjoy” such modern conveniences as ipods, computers, cellphones, microwaves or TV, we seemed to have more than enough time to do all that we wanted to do. We were happy and satisfied. Gloves were worn to church, to tea, to shop, to travel and to both day and evening parties. It was a time of wholesome family entertainment when “gay” meant being happy, living carefree, having fun. Life was gentle, people were gentle and white gloves were representative of the times.”

So the new liturgy might be called a “white gloves” liturgy. And maybe the Holy Ghost has returned! Perhaps a more formal liturgy reflects a longing for deeper values. I won’t be wearing gloves, but I will be holding my hands up in prayer. And with a sense of humor we will trust God’s Spirit or God’s Ghost. As the good Monsignor Edward Miller once said: “Coast to coast, with the Holy Ghost!”