

What's Old is New Again

The Catholic Review

"What's old is new again." This well-known expression sums up the vast majority of the comments I've heard since our Church began using the new translation of the Roman Missal, the prayers we say each week at Mass, Nov. 26-27.

Though the translation was intended to reflect more literally the original Latin text, the new language already seems to be having some beneficial and grace-filled "side effects."

I spoke to a diverse cross-section of priests this past week to gain some insights into their reactions - as well as those of their people - to the changes. Their responses were amazingly consistent and enlightening.

Overwhelmingly positive, the priests I contacted said that as far as they were concerned (there are far more changes to the words said by the priests compared to the responses of the faithful) the changes were helpful to them in their celebration of the Mass because it forced them to slow down, to focus their attention on the actual words.

The new translation of the original Latin revealed exciting new dimensions of the artistic and literary beauty of the Mass as it conjured up new images of the sacred mysteries. Through the lens of this new language, the priests and some of their people found the new translation more poetic, and agreed that the new cadence, though it would take some time getting used to, had the surprising benefit of forcing them to pray the words of the Mass more deliberately, more thoughtfully.

Not all the reviews were positive. "And with your spirit" will certainly take some getting used to, as many priests found people unintentionally reverting back to the familiar "and also with you" or the new hybrid "and also with your spirit" responses. It will take some time, indeed.

Nearly all the priests I spoke to expressed regrets that the new language made it

difficult for them to enter deeply into prayer during the Mass because they were distracted by the book. A change of just one or two words created an obstacle that will take some time before our priests are able to celebrate the Mass in the prayer-filled and zestful style to which we are accustomed – a blessing by which so many in our Archdiocese have been “spoiled.”

Of this challenge, one pastor wrote to his people in last week’s parish bulletin: “My unfamiliarity with the new translation has led to a rupture in my ability to enter deeply into prayer with all of you. I realize now the great gift I have been given in such a community that prays so well together. It is more than simply good liturgy (although we have that in spades) or careful preparation. It is about the way we come together as the Body of Christ to listen to and to support one another in prayer and in sacrifice.”

After much preparation (years on the national/international level and months here in our Archdiocese, including workshops, classroom and video presentations, bulletin inserts, and countless stories and special sections in *The Catholic Review*), the Church has chosen Advent as the time in the liturgical year to begin this journey of renewal. What an appropriate time, as we begin the new Church year with a refreshing look at not only the words we say at Mass, but also our gestures, posture and our entire understanding and participation in the Eucharist and the celebration of the Mass.

Moreover the changes, which are taking effect in dioceses in all English-speaking nations, have ushered in a time of universal fraternal unity. By walking through these changes together as we prepare to celebrate the birth of our Savior, Catholics throughout the English-speaking world are saying the very same words at the very same time, thus bringing together various parishes and people and helping us to realize our unity as a worldwide community of faith.

One pastor expertly summed up the overall experience when he said, “The new translations ... have awakened a renewed prayerfulness in our worship. I know that the challenges of the new Missal are significant, but our desire to pray well is even more significant. In time we will become more comfortable ... we simply need to be patient with ourselves.”

I am grateful to so many who helped to make this transition a smooth one for our Church, including our priests and people. I especially note the fine work of the liturgical committees led locally by our Director of Worship, Catherine Combier-Donovan, and nationally by our own Monsignor Richard Hilgartner. I pray these changes will encourage each of us into a deeper, more meaningful experience during the celebration of the Eucharist this Advent and beyond.