

The Sacred Liturgy in the Digital Age

With increased use of e-readers (e.g., Kindle and Nook), tablet computers (such as iPads), and an ever-increasing variety of mobile device applications (apps), it is no surprise that many have begun searching for liturgical texts in digital formats. Publishers have received inquiries about whether published editions of the *Roman Missal* would also be available in digital formats (such as on Kindle or other e-readers or as downloadable or CD formats). As new technologies continue to emerge, there will undoubtedly be new ways to make use of them even in the context of the ministry of the Church and the Liturgy in particular.

Some say that the Church has been slow to embrace technology. The invention of the printing press in the 15th Century allowed for the standardization of liturgical books after the Council of Trent, but not before some initial resistance to “modern” technology. Many believed that the transmission of the inspired Word of God in the Bible was enabled through the work of monks in the scriptorium, and use of a printing press would preclude that ministry. Obviously the caution eventually gave way to its extensive use that allowed for new forms of teaching and spreading the Gospel.

Today, the Church makes use of a wide range of technology to teach, share news, and even build community. Parishes, dioceses, and Conferences of Bishops make use of websites, Facebook, and Twitter, and many pastors and bishops host their own weblogs. Within the Liturgy, people take for granted the use of sound amplification for spoken words, but see more and more the use of sophisticated amplification for vocal and instrumental music. In an effort to be flexible as well as “environmentally friendly,” some parishes make use of LCD projectors and screens to project texts and music in lieu of printed participation aids, which also creates the possibility of multimedia applications. Little guidance for the use of new technology has been given thus far, and liturgical norms do not specifically address many of the questions that have begun to emerge. In the Information Age, how does the Church transmit the Faith that is ageless?

In regard to liturgical books, there has been speculation about the future. In the secular world, some envision a paperless society as books and other print media are replaced by tablets, e-readers, and other mobile devices. What would happen to liturgical books? While it is impossible to speculate about the future, liturgists wisely caution about moving too quickly in this direction. On a practical level, such devices are not foolproof and can occasionally freeze up, requiring a restart. On a deeper level, we treat objects admitted for liturgical use with respect and understand that once given over to liturgical use, they are used solely for that purpose. To use an iPad, for example, in place of a printed Missal, what happens after its use in the Mass? Is that same iPad later used to check e-mail, browse the Internet, play games, or watch streaming video?

Liturgical books also have a physical form that points to the “substance” of prayer and worship. Liturgical texts are not “disposable,” and yet downloadable texts that can be printed and then discarded, or digital formats that can be deleted, would seem to indicate otherwise. Mobile apps that deliver prayers, including daily Scripture readings and the *Liturgy of the Hours*, make prayer at any time and any place convenient, and by doing so they promote habits of prayer. But should these digital formats replace the printed texts and ritual editions?

The question of copyright is also a sensitive matter. The Latin texts of the *Missale Romanum* and other liturgical books are protected by copyright, held and administered by the Holy See. The copyright of English liturgical texts, including the *Roman Missal*, is held and administered by the International Commission on English in the Liturgy, on behalf of its member Conferences of Bishops, according to its mandate from the Holy See. Texts proper to the Dioceses of the United States, including the *Lectionary for Mass*, are copyrighted by the USCCB. Any digital reproduction of liturgical texts, even excerpts thereof, including projected texts, on websites or other mobile devices, is also subject to copyright guidelines. Developers of websites and of mobile apps must secure permission for the inclusion of liturgical texts, even if such products are available free of charge.

When the final approved text of the *Roman Missal, Third Edition*, was sent to the USCCB in August 2010, the Congregation for Divine Worship and the Discipline of the Sacraments also included a series of *Observations Regarding Publication of the New English-Language Missal*. Many of these particular observations addressed

matters of format and design, indicating what decisions could be left to the Committee on Divine Worship or to individual publishers. In addition, the observations addressed the question of digital or online publication: “The Congregation considers it inappropriate that the text of the Missal, or other liturgical books, be published online” (no. 47). Still, some limited texts of the *Missal*, including the Order of Mass, have been made available on the USCCB *Roman Missal* website, www.USCCB.org/romanmissal, for catechesis and preparation for implementation.

These questions will not be answered quickly or easily. While the Liturgy follows tradition as part of a hermeneutic of continuity, the Liturgy is also celebrated in the era of the New Evangelization. Technology can serve the Liturgy well, but we must be cautious not to put the Liturgy at the service of technology. The Committee on Divine Worship, aware that existing liturgical norms are inadequate in addressing these questions, already began discussion about some questions in regard to publication of the *Roman Missal, Third Edition*, and plans to continue with a discussion of the larger questions of new technologies and the Liturgy at its meetings this year. Bishops, pastors, liturgists, and publishers must discern carefully not only the opportunities available but, more importantly, the needs of the Church in establishing liturgical guidelines or norms for the digital age.

How to Dispose of Old Copies of the *Sacramentary*

The Secretariat of Divine Worship has received a number of timely inquiries regarding the disposition of copies of the current *Sacramentary* once the new *Roman Missal, Third Edition* has been implemented.

There is relatively little written about exactly what to do with liturgical books which have been replaced by updated or revised editions, but some related writings, as well as some common sense, can provide some context. The *Book of Blessings*, no. 1343, indicates that the *Sacramentary*, the *Lectionary*, and other liturgical books are counted among those articles used in the Sacred Liturgy which ought to be blessed using the rite provided for that purpose, the Order for the Blessing of Articles for Liturgical Use (nos. 1341-1359). The Latin *De Benedictionibus, editio typica*, however, does not explicitly mention the *Missale* among the articles that are properly blessed.

Whether or not the *Sacramentary* has been blessed by an official rite, it is appropriate to treat it with care as it has been admitted into liturgical use. Its disposal should be handled with respect. The Secretariat recommends burying the *Sacramentary* in an appropriate location on church grounds, or perhaps in a parish cemetery if there is one. Some have even suggested following a custom used in various Eastern Churches whereby liturgical books or Bibles are placed in the coffin of the deceased as a sign of devotion and love for the Liturgy. In lieu of burying old liturgical books, they could be burned, and the ashes placed in the ground in an appropriate location on church grounds. It is advisable to retain a copy of the *Sacramentary* for parish archives or liturgical libraries.

Looking ahead to the reception of the *Roman Missal, Third Edition*, the above-mentioned blessing from the *Book of Blessings* could be used to bless copies of the *Missal* before their first use on the First Sunday of Advent, November 27, 2011. The blessing could take place during a Mass on the Solemnity of Our Lord Jesus Christ the King, at the last weekday Mass prior to the First Sunday of Advent, or outside Mass at a separate gathering of liturgical ministers or other parish leaders.

Many parishes will also replace hymnals and other participation aids (such as hand missals) in light of updated editions corresponding to the new *Roman Missal*. While the Blessing of Articles for Liturgical Use also mentions hymnals, it might be difficult to appropriately dispose of a large number of copies of such books. After setting aside an appropriate number of copies for archives and libraries, other copies could be stored for use by prayer or study groups in the parish, offered to parishioners for their own private devotional use, or donated to other small communities that could effectively make use of them. Due to copyright agreements, annual hymnals and participation aids should be discarded after their prescribed period of use and cannot be retained for other uses in parishes.