

THE NEW ROMAN MISSAL – FIVE YEARS AND COUNTING

On the first Sunday in Advent in 2011, churches throughout the English-speaking world began to pray from the *New Roman Missal* at mass. The introduction of these new translations presented both an opportunity and a challenge for Vatican II Catholics who had been worshipping in the same way, with the same words, for over forty years.

Back in 2011, I wrote a fifteen-part series on these new translations to help prepare my parishioners at St. John Fisher for this “new” mass, and people seemed to appreciate those reflections.

Looking back at the bulletins from 2011 here at St. Joseph, there were five articles on the new missal reprinted from a national magazine; but they were, to my mind, too theologically obscure to be very helpful. On the other hand, Deacon Dan wrote a couple of more down-to-earth reflections as well as comparison pages between old and new texts which I’m sure were helpful. But since I spent so much time writing my series back then, and since I think it presents a more comprehensive overview of the New Roman Missal, I felt that this five-year anniversary of its introduction would be a good time to share these articles with you. And on a purely selfish note, this series will provide me with some mental breathing room, lest I run out of things to write about in the coming months. And it will also allow me to focus on the next Adult Formation series which will begin in January. And the articles probably won’t be consecutive because there will be weeks when I’ll need to or want to write about something else.

Back in 2011, I observed that learning to pray the New Roman Missal would require “hard work” on the part of all God’s people in the English speaking world. But why should we have to *work* at praying? Well, there’s a fairly good answer to that question. The very meaning of the word *liturgy* has a somewhat complicated origin in Greek, but it has been loosely translated—at least since Vatican II—as “the work of the people.” I always remember the legendary Chicago liturgical author and teacher, Gabe Huck, saying that we should all be very tired after celebrating mass because we have *worked* so hard at praying well together!

Now admittedly, one thing we all need when we come to mass is a brief respite from the busyness of everyday life as well as a spiritual boost to energize us for the coming week. But it’s also true that we come together in church, *as* Church, not just to *get* something but to *give* something—namely *ourselves*, given in love to the God who created us in love, who redeemed us through Jesus, and who continues to sanctify us through the power of the Spirit. The liturgy, the *work* of worship deserves, in the words of the U.S. Bishops many years ago, our “full, conscious and active participation.” But let’s be honest: how often do we pray the prayers and recite the responses of the mass without giving a whole lot of thought to the deepest truths of what we’re saying? As a presider, I have to push myself over and over again to ponder the prayers I say and to do the best I can to make them fresh and alive for both myself and for you.

The introduction of the New Roman Missal five years ago gave us a rare and wonderful opportunity to refresh our appreciation of the *work* we’re called to do each week and to deepen our understanding of the truths we proclaim—perhaps somewhat carelessly or casually at times—in the presence of our generous and loving Creator. Five years on, it’s not such a bad idea to reflect again on these “new” prayers and to recommit ourselves to that “full, conscious and active participation” that’s necessary for our *work* of worship in this new liturgical year.

Fr. Bob