

RETURN TO THE NEW ROMAN MISSAL THE LITURGY OF THE WORD - PART I

I left this series about six months ago and moved on to other topics that were more timely or urgent. But now that I'll be going on vacation in a few weeks, I'll resume this 5th anniversary overview of the *New Roman Missal* with the first of the final six installments. I think it's always beneficial to look more deeply into the words and rituals of the Mass which are so easy to take for granted, and the promulgation of the revised missal a little more than five years ago has given us a great opportunity to do just that.

The *Liturgy of the Word* really begins when we sit down for the first time and the Lector approaches the ambo to proclaim the first scripture reading. In the past five years, we've grown familiar with the only changes surrounding the proclamation of scripture: *And with your Spirit* and the addition of "O" in *Glory to you, O Lord*. However, more changes are supposedly on the way with the re-translation of all the scripture readings in the *Lectionary* and the *Book of the Gospels*, but I've heard nothing more about that for several years now.

Probably the most challenging and extensive of all the changes we experienced have been found in the *Profession of Faith* (the *Creed*). The most obvious was the replacement of "we" with "I" believe. Why did that change? Isn't this something we're affirming together, the essential truths of our common faith? Yes and no. As with all the other parts and prayer of the Mass, we are indeed saying the *Profession of Faith* together; but this particular part is unique and uniquely personal. As is the case with so many of the changes we've encountered in the *New Roman Missal*, the Latin original points us in the right direction: *Credo – I believe*. But as elsewhere in the new translations, it's not just about being faithful to the Latin.

The *Profession of Faith* at Mass is meant to remind us of our baptismal promises and allow us to personally reaffirm those promises in a public forum each week of our lives. When a child is baptized and the parents and Godparents are asked to profess their faith in the name of the child, the response is always in the first person singular: *I do*. When we all renew the promises of baptism at the Easter Vigil or on Easter Sunday, again it's *I do*. Although our faith is indeed shared with the entire Communion of Saints, no one else can claim that faith for us nor can any one of us claim it for another. At baptism, parents and Godparents speak for the child only because the child can't speak for him or herself. Once we can speak for ourselves, we must: *I believe*. That *I* is repeated six times in the newly translated *Profession of Faith*.

But moving on through the *Profession of Faith* we quickly find another example of theological clarity when, instead of speaking of God as the *maker...of all that is seen and unseen*, we now profess our faith in the God who is the *maker...of all things visible and*

invisible. So what's the difference between *unseen* and *invisible*? The subtle but significant point is that there are dimensions of creation that are not merely *unseen* by us as if they were hidden behind a curtain, but truly *invisible* to us—at least while we live on this earth. Saints and angels would be examples, not to mention seraphim and cherubim. Although saints may have appeared in human form in rare instances throughout history, their true spiritual form is really *invisible* to our human eyes.

A few lines farther on in the *Profession of Faith*, we come to another small change that stems from a desire to be consistent with scriptural and liturgical tradition. When we profess our faith in Jesus, we now say that he is *born of the Father before all ages* instead of *eternally begotten of the Father*. Exactly the same truth, but the new phrasing matches the wording in one of the Prefaces for Christmas proclaiming that *Christ is your Son before all ages, yet now he is born in time*. This effort to use consistent phrasing throughout the Mass in expressing theological truths is one of the driving forces behind much of the translation of the *New Roman Missal*.

So far in this article, I've covered less than one-third of the *Profession of Faith*, and there are three more significant changes that should be considered; but those range from theologically complex to stunningly beautiful and deserve their own separate consideration which will be found in the next installment in this series—presumably next week, unless something more timely or pressing comes to mind.

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