

RETURN TO THE NEW ROMAN MISSAL THE LITURGY OF THE EUCHARIST - PART III

So far, we've looked at some of the changes we encountered a bit more than five years ago in the assembly's prayers and those of the priest-presider in all of the Eucharistic Prayers of the *New Roman Missal*. Now, I'd like to consider just a few of the beautiful and poetic, scripturally and theologically rich texts that we find in the two Eucharistic Prayers probably used most often: **Eucharistic Prayers II and III**.

In one of the earlier articles in this series, I pointed out that the original Latin translation of the Mass commissioned by Vatican II contained extraordinarily rich imagery, significant scriptural allusions and profound theological insights – none of which even I learned in the seminary! For a variety of reasons, much of that was lost on the journey from Latin to English. But the English translators of our *New Roman Missal* took that journey again and endeavored to restore what was literally “lost in translation.” To my mind and my ear – in most cases, though not all – it was a job well done.

Eucharistic Prayer II (hereafter EPII) is the shortest of all, but has its origin in some of the oldest liturgical texts available—from the 3rd and 4th centuries. At the very beginning of this prayer, we find words both beautiful and scriptural. After Vatican II the priest prayed: *Let your Spirit come upon these gifts to make them holy...* Now he says: ***Make holy, therefore, these gifts, we pray, by sending down your Spirit upon them like the dewfall.*** Poetry? Absolutely, but also an evocative allusion to the Exodus moment when the starving Israelites woke in the morning to find bread from heaven, the mysterious manna, strewn *like the dewfall* all around their camps.

Further on, instead of praying that we *be brought together in unity by the Holy Spirit*, the priest now prays that ***we may be gathered into one by the Holy Spirit***. This is a subtle change, but again scriptural, reminding us of the parables of Jesus where the grain of the harvest is *gathered* into the heavenly barn, or hearkening back to prophetic Old Testament passages recalling grain *gathered on the hillsides*. And in the very next lines we pray: *Remember, Lord, your Church, spread throughout the world*. The addition of just that one word expresses, in such an evocative way, both the universality and unity of the Church.

In every Eucharistic Prayer, we remember those who have died. Here, in EPII, we pray for them in this way (with the important theological clarifications and scriptural allusions highlighted): *Remember, also, our brothers and sisters who have fallen asleep in the hope of the resurrection and all who have died in your mercy; welcome them into the light of your face.* Falling asleep is how we Christians are challenged to think of death. Recall Lazarus, when Jesus assures Martha and Mary that “he is only sleeping.” Or consider the Orthodox name for the solemnity of Mary's Assumption we just recently celebrated: the *Dormition*, the *falling asleep* of the Virgin. If we truly live in *hope of the*

resurrection, death is nothing more than a very long slumber until Jesus comes again! Then, instead of presumptuously asking that *all the departed* be welcomed into heaven, we acknowledge that we are not God, and only God's *mercy*, genuinely desired and freely accepted, can bring any of us there. Finally, we reclaim an image that goes back all the way to the Book of Exodus when Moses comes face to face with God on Mount Sinai, an image that recurs throughout scripture, right up to the Transfiguration of Jesus we celebrated just one month ago and in the visions of St. John in the Book of Revelation: the *light* of *God's face*. That's the vision that all of us who *fall asleep in God's mercy* hope to behold for all eternity.

Next week: some thoughts about Eucharistic Prayer III, a consideration of a word we hear a lot in many of the prayers of the *New Roman Missal*, and the four beautiful new Eucharistic Prayers we've been blessed to receive.

Fr. Bob