

RETURN TO THE NEW ROMAN MISSAL FINAL THOUGHTS ON LITURGICAL LANGUAGE

Some time ago in an earlier series about actions and words in the Mass, I reflected on the unique and sacred nature of worship which challenges us to speak differently than we do in any other situation. In this current series, I've given examples of the distinctive—and sometimes unusual—words we've been praying since the *New Roman Missal* was introduced nearly six years ago. But I haven't focused so much on the *Presidential Prayers*—those which the priest-president alone prays in the *Collect*, the *Prayer Over the Offerings*, and in the *Prayer after Communion*. Those prayers have acquired greater formality and theological precision, as well as some poetic language and scriptural allusions in the new missal. And some new phrasing was added that emphasized the humility we should feel in daring to ask anything of our Creator.

As challenging as some of this liturgical language can be at times, for both speaker and listener, in most cases it reflects some of the deepest *truths* of our faith in words that are truly unique to the *expression* of our faith. I'm just grateful that no one thought to return to the archaic *thees* and *thous* of the past which are merely relics of medieval history and have nothing whatsoever to do with the way we address God in any age. It's bad enough that our hymnal fails to excise these linguistic anachronisms which almost every other Catholic hymnal has done away with. But on to some examples of what we hear each week....

The first Presidential Prayer of the Mass had been known simply as the *Opening Prayer* after Vatican II. It is now known by its original name, the *Collect* which really reflects its purpose in the Mass: it “collects” the prayers of God's people as we enter into worship and directs those prayers toward the season or feast being celebrated. Also, after Vatican II, the priest had a choice of two *Opening Prayers* for Sundays and solemnities, one of which was an original composition of the English-speaking translators and authors. Now, there is just one *Collect* for every Sunday and solemnity, just as there had been for other feast days in the Church calendar.

The second Presidential Prayer is the *Prayer over the Offerings*, formerly called the *Prayer Over the Gifts*—a minor change, but an intentional one to emphasize the sacrificial aspect of the Eucharist. When we reach the upcoming season of Advent in just a few months, here is an example of the humility I referenced earlier that we find in so many of these prayers:

*Be pleased, O Lord, with our humble prayers and offerings,
and since we have no merits to plead our cause, come, we pray, to our rescue
with the protection of your mercy. Through Christ our Lord.*

I don't think I need to point out all the elements of that prayer that emphasize humility in God's presence, though to some, this might seem to be an excess of humility. However, in a world where we mere mortals can sometimes harbor the illusion that we

are—or should be—in control of our lives, there might be a great need to acknowledge the limits of our own power when we stand in the presence of the only One who is all-powerful.

The third Presidential Prayer of the Mass is the *Prayer after Communion*. Here is another example from the fourth Sunday of Advent:

*Having received this pledge of eternal redemption, we pray, almighty God,
that, as the feast day of our salvation draws ever nearer,
so we may press forward all the more eagerly
to the worthy celebration of the mystery of your Son's Nativity.
Who lives and reigns forever and ever.*

Worthy is a subtle indication of humility; *Nativity* is the proper theological name for Christmas; and *press forward* has poetic and scriptural power. Like so many of the prayers of the Mass, this entire prayer is one long sentence with lots of dependent clauses, forcing us priests to work hard at praying with great care and thoughtfulness.

My hope is that these reflections on the nearly six year-old *New Roman Missal* will bring everyone a greater appreciation of our common prayer and help all of us to pray with a greater awareness and a deeper conviction as we offer to God our sacrifice of praise throughout the year.

Fr. Bob