



Liturgy It's How We Pray

By Father Greg Friedman, O.F.M.

A LOT HAS CHANGED in the way we communicate. It's taken some of us years to adjust, to cope with the fast pace of change. The same is true about change in the Church. The most recent changes started about 50 years ago—some reading this will remember the sometimes chaotic changes of the 1960s and 70s!

Most of the changes have been helpful; some weren't. Sometimes, we just didn't get a good explanation of what was happening and why. Like my fellow pastors in parishes around the country, I've been pondering the changes to the prayers which we all pray at Mass, and how we can avoid another round of confusion.

Even though the forthcoming changes in the prayers of Mass are relatively small, some understanding of what's behind the changes will help all of us make the adjustment.

We talked about how the missal has changed over the centuries in the first issue of this series. The changes happen from time to time, yet, when change happens in the parts of our life which

are very important—like our Sunday worship—it can be difficult to embrace.

But we're all passionate about our liturgy. As a priest, I'm passionate to find ways to explain the meaning of liturgy to ordinary Catholics like you and me. This series of handouts is designed to help you understand the new translation of the Mass in a way which I'm hoping will help you adapt to the change. For each issue, I've tried to imagine how my own parishioners will react to the changes in the Mass prayers, and what they might want to know about them.

Let's begin by looking at how we pray.

Prayer: public vs. personal

The place to begin understanding the changes in the prayers at Mass is to appreciate that our prayer *in Church* is different than our personal prayer. Our *personal* prayer is just that: *personal*.

I remember watching my Italian grandmother fingering her rosary beads

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'And With Your Spirit'

THIS CHANGE IS PREDICTED to be the toughest to make: The deeply familiar response is used frequently in the liturgy. It's perhaps the change which will prompt Catholics to ask, "Why?" In a word, greater fidelity to the basic Latin text.

Those of my age and older who served Mass when it was in Latin, know the Latin response well: "*Et cum spiritu tuo*," literally, "And with your spirit." That translation expresses a little more than the words we use today.

as she sat in her rocking chair. I also recall that after my father died, I found a prayer book full of holy cards. I realized

that he had dutifully prayed from that book, and probably had used some of those holy cards, with devotional prayers from various saints.

Both my grandmother and my father freely chose their style and their texts, to pray as God moved them. My personal prayer and yours might be similar to theirs, or it might be different. As long as we're taking time to pray, the

style, the words, the method of personal prayer is secondary.

Public Prayer

When we gather for Eucharist, and for other communal prayers, our prayer takes on a different character. Now, the prayer must bear the burden of expressing common faith in a way that will help to bring all those in attendance together in unity. Our communal prayer expresses our unity as the Body of Christ. But since the Eucharist is a sacrament, with the power to actually bring about the unity which the prayers and rituals express, that holy action must be carefully structured.

The Church has learned from 2,000 years of practical experience! Human communication depends on language and gesture, with language being so critical to good communication. The public prayer of the Church—the liturgy—needs to be structured and organized.

The texts, the very language of worship, must be carefully written. They must be mastered by those praying the words. We depend upon the carefully written and

proclaimed text. As the priest proclaims the prayers and the assembly responds, the common texts enable us to pray together well, to focus. The texts teach us, hopefully *move* us. The prayers of the Mass are a vehicle for the Holy Spirit to work in us.

So we must have common texts—carefully written and translated well—so that they may be prayed in many languages.

I invite you to reflect on your own experience of celebrating Eucharist. What does it mean to join with parishioners each Sunday? Have you had the experience of Mass in another language or culture? What was that like? How do the familiar prayers of the Mass help to focus your own personal prayer and presence?

If you start there—with the way we pray at Mass—you'll have taken the first step to begin understanding the new translation of the Roman Missal's prayers for the Eucharist.



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This brief handout series is adapted from the 18-segment video, Catholic Update Guide to Changes in the Mass, produced by St. Anthony Messenger Press and the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops.

Questions

- 1 What is your favorite personal prayer? Why?
- 2 Describe a Mass that was especially moving to you. Why was it?
- 3 How does personal prayer connect to public prayer in your life?

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