

New Wineskins of the Revised Roman Missal

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On the First Sunday of Advent (November 27, 2011) the Catholic Church will introduce the English translations to the revisions of the Roman Missal. What is the Roman Missal? It is the liturgical book that contains the texts and “directions” (called rubrics) for the celebration of the Mass in the Latin Rite of the Catholic Church. The Roman Missal’s official version is in Latin – and that is remaining the same. What is changing is the English translation of the Latin – not the structure of the Mass itself.

One obvious question is why was a change needed? If you have been following the chatter on the web, emails, blogs and the like, there is no shortage of opinions about the change. Some proclaim that the Mass is being “restored” to an authentic celebration. Some bemoan it all as a “regression” and movement away from the spirit of Vatican II. One person even emailed me pointing out that the English translation being used (the *authorized* Roman Missal) did not word-for-word translate the Latin edition and therefore none of the Masses I celebrate were valid, none of you met your Sunday obligation and thus we were all hopelessly lost in sin. *Hmmm?* No, he wasn’t a parishioner. Nor was he correct.

So, why was a change needed? Left to my own devices I probably would not have changed things. Don’t wait for a wonderful theological, biblical or spiritual reason why. It is more fundamental: I am a creature of habit. After all, things are good – it “ain’t broke so don’t fix it.” We are familiar with the way things are. We know the order of things, the words and responses, and our part, so won’t we be better able to participate in deeper and more meaningful ways?

It was the priest’s first Sunday in his new assignment. Wanting to make a good impression on the parishioners, he decided that he would engage them with a humorous story at the beginning of Mass. After the procession and opening song, he stepped to the microphone and realized he had never used the sound system in the church, so he nervously tapped the microphone to test its sound. Nothing! He quickly called out to the young man on the sound board in the choir area, “Something’s wrong with the microphone.” Everyone in the pews dutifully responded, “And also with you.”

Of course there is a downside to familiarity of the Mass and its responses. We could say them with our eyes closed (not yet opened?) – and sometimes with our minds and hearts closed as well. Sometimes we are too concerned with holding on to the “old wineskin.”

³⁷ *Likewise, no one pours new wine into old wineskins. Otherwise, the new wine will burst the skins, and it will be spilled, and the skins will be ruined.* ³⁸ *Rather, new wine must be poured into fresh wineskins* (Luke 5:37-38).

Like all changes that happen in life, the new translation of the Missal will mean an adjustment. But at the same time it is an opportunity. Yes, things are good, but as Cardinal Newman once said, the good becomes the enemy when it keeps you from the best. Change is coming this Advent and so we need to embrace the changes presented to us keeping clearly in our minds and hearts that the Mass was never ours. It is the Lord’s who has entrusted it to the Church. As steward of the Sacred Liturgy, the Church is charged, in every age, to endeavor to express the mystery of the Mass more clearly, to celebrate it

more richly, and thus lead the People of God to participate more faithfully in the mystery of Christ's sacrifice, so that we might receive the fullness of His grace.

"Lex orandi, lex credendi, lex vivendi!" As we pray, we believe, and as we believe, we live! The opportunity we have before us with the new wine of this translation is to fashion a new wineskin of ourselves as individuals and as a worshipping community... *new wine must be poured into fresh wineskins* (Luke 5:38).

Change is coming. May we embrace the changes that we pray more richly, believe more faithfully and thus live more completely the fullness of God's grace. Sometimes, it is catalyst of change that makes us realize that the best lays before us waiting to be taken up.