More Change in the Air

While the work on the translation of the Missale Romanum 2002 moves forward, there have been a few recent developments concerning the Missal and the Order of Mass that merit some further reflection.

In October 2008, a corrected edition of the third authoritative Latin edition of the Roman Missal was released (formally called the Missale Romanum tertia editio typica emendata). It was formally presented to Pope Benedict XVI in November. The notice of this revision had already been given by the CDWDS earlier in 2008. Most of the changes are deemed as minor, typographical corrections or changes: for example, correction of accents, punctuation, and mistakes in the ink color (some “rubrics” appeared in black rather than red) as well as attention to page turns to avoid breaking up a prayer. However, there are two more substantive changes worth noting.

New Dismissals

The first more substantive change is the addition of three new formulas to the Order of Mass for the dismissal. It may be a surprise to most people that there was only one before. The official Latin editions of the Missale Romanum 1970, 1975, and 2002, gave one formula: *Ite, missa est* (translated into English as “Go, the Mass is ended.”) The current U.S. vernacular edition (1985) offers three additional formulas, namely “Go in the peace of Christ”; “The Mass is ended, go in peace”; and “Go in peace to love and serve the Lord.” While these are the only approved adaptations to the dismissal, the impulse to make a deeper connection between the liturgy, mission, and daily life often gives rise in many parishes to further variations. One example comes from the practice in Life Teen Masses of replacing the dismissal with expressions like “The Mass never ends, it must be lived.” The use of this improvisation was formally rejected by the congregation in 2004. It is also interesting to note by comparison that the 1983 Italian-language Missal offers five variations.

The impetus for the inclusion of new formulas for the dismissal was the 2005 Synod for the Eucharist. In his post-synodal apostolic exhortation Sacramentum Caritatis, no. 51, Benedict XVI explained:

I would like to comment briefly on the observations of the Synod Fathers regarding the dismissal at the end of the eucharistic celebration. After the blessing, the deacon or the priest
dismisses the people with the words: *Ite, missa est*. These words help us to grasp the relationship between the Mass just celebrated and the mission of Christians in the world. In antiquity, *missa* simply meant “dismissal.” However in Christian usage it gradually took on a deeper meaning. The word “dismissal” has come to imply a “mission.” These few words succinctly express the missionary nature of the Church. The People of God might be helped to understand more clearly this essential dimension of the Church’s life, taking the dismissal as a starting-point. In this context, it might also be helpful to provide new texts, duly approved, for the prayer over the people and the final blessing, in order to make this connection clear.

It is interesting to note how developments in the vernacular liturgy that helped to expand this sense of a connection between dismissal and mission have now been brought into the official Latin liturgical tradition of the church.

Cardinal Arinze, then prefect of the CDWDS, explained that the congregation narrowed down a list of seventy-two possibilities to nine from which the pope himself picked the final three (see Cardinal). The new options are: *Ite ad Evangelium annuntiandum*; *Ite in pace, glorificando vita vestra Dominum*; and *Ite in pace*. In English-speaking regions, these will be rendered respectively as “Go and announce the Gospel of the Lord”; “Go in peace, glorifying the Lord by your life”; and “Go in peace.” The original *Ite, missa est* will be rendered as “Go forth, the Mass is ended.” Unfortunately, “Go in peace to love and serve the Lord” appears to have been cut in this process, but perhaps it can be retained as a U.S. adaptation in addition to the new translations.

**Eucharistic Prayers for Children**

Another more significant change concerns the future placement of the three Eucharistic Prayers for Masses with Children (EPMC). They will no longer be in the *Missale Romanum*; rather, they will be issued in a separate booklet. Some uninformed media reports led to sensationalism around the reputed demise of these prayers. It is important to set this change in perspective. The prayers were first issued in 1974, following the publication of the *Directory for Masses with Children*. They were sent to the conferences of bishops who had requested them, along with the two Eucharistic Prayers for Reconciliation in the same booklet. In the United States, they were added to the 1985 *Sacramentary* in appendix 6, so we became used to having them at hand. While the directives restrict these eucharistic prayers to Masses where children are the totality or majority of those in the assembly, many priests avail themselves of these prayers on a more regular basis for primarily adult assemblies.

Only in 2002 were the EPMC included in the official *Missale Romanum* for the first time, in an appendix (with several emendations to the 1974 texts). There are two things to note here. First, the EPMC would now be seen as fully part of the Roman Rite, albeit a minor one given their position in an appendix. However, at the same time, the prayers are not meant for use in Latin, so there is not much reason to include them in a book destined for celebration. The texts were headed, “Textus typicus seu exemplar” (*MR2002*, p. 1271). The introduction indicates generous norms for their translation and local adaptations (see nos. 9–13), as identifying them as a “model” seems to indicate.

Concerning the decision to move them out of the *Missale Romanum*, Cardinal Arinze explained: “Actually, it was preferred that these two [sic] eucharistic prayers not be
seen as obligatory for the whole Church. Perhaps, then, it is not as necessary to have eucharistic prayers appropriate to children. This said, if there are conferences of bishops who want to keep them, they can do it in national missals” (Cardinale). The USCCB vote on the new English-language translation of the EPMC was tabled in November 2008. Bishop Serratelli, chairman of the Bishops’ Committee on Divine Worship, explained the intention would be to “publish a separate text at a later time” (in O’Brien).

We can hope that this development presents an opportunity to explore some further options for celebrations with children, shaping them for full, conscious, active participation in the liturgy. For example, in 1976 the Italian Bishops’ Conference published the EPMC in a separate volume together with presidential prayers adapted to children and special music for the acclamations found in those eucharistic prayers. Contrary to Arinze’s estimation, the prayers have proved pastorally to be a valuable addition to vernacular celebration with children.

**Sign of Peace**

One further development under discussion, not related to the release of the corrected Missal, was also inspired by the Synod on the Eucharist. It concerns the rite of peace at Mass. In *Sacramentum Caritatis*, the pope extolled the great value of the exchange of the sign of peace and noted, “In our times, fraught with fear and conflict, this gesture has become particularly eloquent, as the Church has become increasingly conscious of her responsibility to pray insistently for the gift of peace and unity for herself and for the whole human family” (no. 49). However, he went on to note that it can become “exaggerated,” causing “a certain distraction in the assembly just before the reception of Communion.” Thus, he says, it should be marked by “sobriety” and exchanged only with “one’s immediate neighbors” (no. 49). This positive estimation and call for its continued use challenge those who dismiss the sign of peace as “merely” an option that creates, in the words of Cardinal Arinze, the “boisterous spirit” of a “jamboree” just before communion (see Biccini).

The pope makes further comment on this matter:

Taking into account ancient and venerable customs and the wishes expressed by the Synod Fathers, I have asked the competent curial offices to study the possibility of moving the sign of peace to another place, such as before the presentation of the gifts at the altar. To do so would also serve as a significant reminder of the Lord’s insistence that we be reconciled with others before offering our gifts to God (cf. Mt 5:23 ff.). (no. 50, n. 150)

Thus, the CDWDS undertook a wide consultation and reported back to the pope. The pope then asked the CDWDS to write the conferences of bishops and ask them their opinion on choosing between leaving the rite of peace where it is or moving it after the prayer of the faithful before the preparation of the gifts. In the United States, eighty-nine bishops responded to the survey. Of those responding, 66 percent favored moving the sign of peace, while 32 percent wanted to retain its current position. Two percent provided alternatives (Committee on Divine Worship 2008, 42). Interestingly, the proposal to offer the option of moving the sign of peace after the prayer of the faithful had been proposed a U.S. adaptation for the 1998 Sacramentary. It was rejected by Rome at the time.

Arinze reported that results from around the world had been received and that the congregation would offer some comments on them before bringing the matter back to
the pope, who will make the final decision himself (Biccini). This would be a significant change in the Order of Mass, given the long history of its current location before communion.

**A Living Liturgy**

This consideration of the continuing deliberations on and emendations to the Order of Mass and the Missal shows that even once a liturgical book is published, there is a continuing process of reception, adaptation, and revision. Local variations in the vernacular liturgy have come to influence and shape the future of the Roman Rite—the more expansive dismissals and the enthusiastic implementation of the option of the sign of peace as two current examples. Liturgical tradition is a living event, not a book frozen in time that collects dust on the sacristy shelf. Likewise, we will learn from the repeated celebration of the liturgy the strengths and weaknesses of the new translations, just as we did with those from the 1970s.

There is also another crucial reminder to glean from the progress in the past few years. When the revised English-language Missal is finally ready to be implemented, we certainly need to help people to understand the changes in a positive way. But this is only the first step. We also need to be ready to lead them to become more aware of their attitudes and bodily participation at Mass, so that they may enter more deeply into the celebration of the liturgy. Liturgical catechesis is not just a matter of offering some instructions about Mass or explaining what has changed. Too often we think we have “done catechesis” when we help people understand the mechanics of the liturgy. Rather, the ultimate goal of liturgical catechesis is to lead people, through the words, symbols, and gestures of the liturgy, to enter more deeply into communion with Jesus Christ (see *General Directory for Catechesis*, no. 80). Then, out of that communion, the connection between liturgy and life can begin to bear fruit.

**References**


Committee on Divine Worship. *Newsletter 44* (October 2008).


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