

Liturgy Article Translation

This Advent, all parishes in the USA will be asked to start an educational and formation program to prepare us for the implementation of the NEW translations, which will be used in our Masses starting Advent, 2011.

I thought a little history might be helpful.

The Vatican Council (1963-65) decreed that the spoken language of “*the people*” might be used for celebrations of Mass and the Sacraments. This was a return to the ancient custom of the Church moving away from 500 years of using Latin, which ceased being the spoken language of the people centuries before.

Pope Paul VI established a commission of international scholars for each language group in the world to translate the New Roman Missal from Latin into the SPOKEN language. These commissions used a translation principal, which called for the translations to reflect the “*SENSE*” of the Latin rather than a slavishly literal translation. This principle rooted in the Vatican Council and preferred among linguists provided us with several versions of the Mass prayers. Each time they were revised, they were a bit better.

Additionally, each English-speaking country was permitted to adapt the translations to their own particular vocabulary so that the Mass prayers would be readily understandable. Just think how different English is in England than here.

The Bishops of the USA approved another revised version of the Mass prayers in 1999, and it was sent to the Vatican for “*confirmation*,” so it could be implemented.

It was then that Pope John Paul II and, reportedly, a much smaller group of mostly Vatican experts decided that all translations now would no longer be permitted to use the translation principle of “*conveying the sense of the original*” but would have to follow an exact and literal translation from the Latin. This was a tremendous change and was met with deep concern by many linguists and bishops. Several attempts at dialogue to modify this requirement proved fruitless. Work then began on preparing another translation to replace the unpublished 1999 version, this time following the demand for a literal translation.

As the years passed, a decreasing number of bishops continued to seek accommodation by seeking the possibility to use the “*sense of the translation*” principle or, at least, to adapt the literal translation to the “*spoken*” language forms suitable for each English-speaking country.

Finally, this year, despite the objections of a small remnant of bishops who fought valiantly for some compromise, the final version was sent to the Vatican for “*confirmation*,” which is expected this summer.

So, where does this leave us? As this Advent begins, we will share the new translations and spend significant time and money to help us make this transition.

Many fear that this translation will result in a “*church*” English or a translation not in harmony with our spoken language or sound stilted.

In spite of these concerns, this can be a good time for us to re-examine the deeper aspects of our Mass and how we celebrate it and why we do and say what we do. This can be a time of deepened appreciation and growth in understanding which, hopefully, will lead to a deeper spirituality. I hope that we will take advantage of this opportunity to do so.

As Advent comes closer, we will share more information.

- Fr. Alan