Changes Invite Dialogue and Renewed Spirituality

Some of us remember the David Bowie song that begins, “Ch-ch-ch-changes . . . ” Change is on the liturgical horizon. We now have the recognitio from the Holy See for the new English translation of the Roman Missal. While we do not have a firm date for implementation, it is generally assumed that the implementation will be the First Sunday of Advent, November 27, 2011. Thus, as the USCCB website on the third edition of the Roman Missal suggests, the “recognitio marks the beginning of preparation for the implementation of the Roman Missal.” Change always evokes a wide variety of responses, from fear to relief to everything in between. The fact that we have been aware for quite some time that these changes are coming simply reinforces the truth that anything that lives changes. The upcoming ch-ch-ch-changes in the texts we pray during the celebration of Mass and in the chant that helps us pray these words in song invite us to enter our role as priest celebrant with fresh energy, interest, and renewed spirit. How we approach these changes will make all the difference not only to our own spiritual lives and ministry but also to those of the people we serve and lead in worship.

The Importance of Singing

The bishops’ document Sing to the Lord: Music in Divine Worship reminds us that “no other single factor affects the Liturgy as much as the attitude, style, and bearing of the priest celebrant, who ‘prays in the name of the Church and of the assembled community.’” As a matter of fact, “the importance of the priest’s participation in the Liturgy, especially by singing, cannot be overemphasized. The priest sings the presidential prayers and dialogues of the Liturgy according to his capabilities, and he encourages sung participation in the Liturgy by his own example, joining in the congregational song.” Both of these truths were reaffirmed for me recently when I presided for the first time at a nearby parish. I had encouraged the participation of the gathered assembly and, on their way out of the church building, a number of people told me that it helped them sing when they saw me carrying a hymnal and singing at various points during the liturgy. Our example makes a difference; our example is infectious. As the saying goes: “Faith is caught more than taught.” I believe that participation is
caught, too, and taught by contagious example.

The new melodies for the chant in the Roman Missal will help us pray the words in new ways. Yes, new melodies mean that more time will be needed to prepare to preside at the Eucharistic celebration. Time is a rare commodity for many of us, especially for busy parish priests. But presiding and preaching are two of the most important tasks in our ordained ministry. Taking time to explore the new chants can familiarize us with the new texts to which they are wed. Though both are rooted in the chant tradition of the Latin (Roman) Church, the musical settings in the new Missal differ from those we’ve known in the Sacramentary that has been our prayer book for nearly forty years. The good news about having to learn new music is that our “muscle memories” won’t lead us into singing the translations with which we are familiar. The melody is changed enough from the familiar settings that we’ll have to concentrate on getting the music right and, without thinking too much about it, readily sing new texts that the music sets. The challenging news about this is that we will have to learn new melodies! However, the chant patterns are consistent enough that, once we know them and become familiar with them, they will become part of our liturgical repertoire.

**IF NOTHING ELSE, SING THE DIALOGUES**

*Musicam Sacram*, the Lectionary for Mass, the General Instruction of the Roman Missal, and Sing to the Lord: Music in Divine Worship all reiterate the importance of singing the dialogues between the priest and the people, e.g. “The Lord be with you,” the preface dialogue, and the dialogue that concludes the readings—to name a few. Here is one of my favorite passages in any text about the liturgy: “Since the celebration of Mass by its nature has a ‘communitarian’ character, both the dialogues between the priest and the faithful gathered together, and the acclamations are of great significance; in fact they are not simply outward signs of communal celebration but foster and bring about communion between priest and people.”

While most of the changes in the new translations of the Roman Missal impact the ordained (nearly every prayer we pray is changed), all members of the liturgical assembly will experience change. It will take time to get used to singing or saying “And with your spirit.” Learning to proclaim that “I believe” the profession of faith will take time. “Holy, Holy, Holy, Lord God of hosts” will take time to learn (or, for older parishioners, re-learn). We are in this together because we pray the liturgy together as the Body of Christ, head and members, as the Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy Sacrosanctum Concilium reminds us. The dialogues invite us all to remember that the liturgy is our prayer as the Body of Christ. Attention to the dialogues deepens the important relationship we share as members of that Body.

This is not new teaching, yet it is still worth repeating that singing the dialogues can be a rich way to reflect on the words we pray, through melodies that help us to express them with freshness and...
meaning, in ways that deepen our bond as members of the one Christ, through whom we pray to God in the power of the Spirit at every Mass. Singing the new translations can invite us to reflect on them so that we can pray them in ways that can be heard with meaning and a renewed spirituality.

**LOOK TWICE BEFORE PRAYING NEW TEXTS**

When I was learning how to negotiate life, my mother often took me by the hand and guided my steps. As we came to a crosswalk, she taught me to look both ways before crossing the street. The new translations that we will pray invite us to look twice—“both ways”—before praying them aloud. Because the texts will be unfamiliar to us, and because they are closer to Latin word order than English word order, they will neither be absorbed as quickly on first reading (or hearing) nor trip off the tongue as easily on first proclamation as do our current texts. That means we will need to take time with them. Read them. Pray them out loud. Get a sense of pace, space, and rhythm so that they can be heard by the people of God gathered for worship. Note again the need to make time in a busy schedule for something that doesn’t necessarily require of us the same amount of time right now. Who of us has time for this? Who among us has as much time as we would like to have? Yet if the words of the Second Vatican Council are true—“In the mystery of the Eucharistic Sacrifice, in which priests fulfill their greatest task, the work of our redemption is being constantly carried on”—then the time required for such tasks will be worth it.

**THE ROMAN MISSAL: OUR DAILY PRAYER BOOK**

I invite us to let the new translations in the third edition of the Roman Missal become our daily prayer book, once the texts are made available to us, even before we begin to use them on a regular basis during public liturgical celebrations. If we do, we will become familiar with new words and images; we will discover things that touch our hearts and minds in ways that nurture us and in ways that challenge us. We will explore melodies in the new chant settings. In the context of prayer we will be able to deepen the love for the liturgy that is at the core of our ordained priestly ministry and the liturgical spirituality we share with our assemblies. We will be able to find ways to pray, for the good of the Church, both the texts that might excite and those that might incite us. We will discover insights helpful to our preaching and teaching and the practice of charity and justice to which celebrating the liturgy leads. And we can help our parishioners make the Roman Missal their prayer book as well. We should invite them to join us in prayer gathered around the new texts; we should use these texts to begin meet-
ings and musical rehearsals and school days and religious education sessions. Feedback from such practices will help us to discover what enables people hear and pray the new texts and what hinders their ability to sing or speak them. That feedback can inform our preaching, our teaching, our presidential style, and the liturgical spirituality that we share with all the baptized.

**CH-CH-CH-Changes**

Change is part of life. Change that touches something that is near and dear to us invites new ways of being, seeing, living, and praying. As the USCCB website on the third edition of the *Roman Missal* notes, the upcoming change in translation involves what the lead article at the site calls “New Words: A Deeper Meaning but the Same Mass.” We have a choice. Will these changes invite us to enter our role as priest celebrant with fresh energy, interest, and renewed spirit? Will we approach them as a task we have to do but which we resist? Will our response be somewhere in between? How we approach these changes makes all the difference. The process won’t be easy, but with prayer, community, song, and understanding, it can help us praise God with full hearts, and minds, and voices; and it can be a process that is life-giving for us and for the people we serve. “The Lord be with you.” “And with your spirit.”

**Notes**

1. See Missal.  
3. STL, 19.  
4. See STL, 33.  
8. See Missal.
THE NEW EVANGELIZATION

With the creation of the new curial Pontifical Council for the New Evangelization, announced by Pope Benedict XVI on June 28, dioceses are scrambling to create and staff their own offices or to update those that were put in operation following the approval (November 18, 1992) of Go and Make Disciples: A National Plan and Strategy for Catholic Evangelization in the United States.

Pope Benedict explained that the new council will be devoted to spreading the Gospel message in regions where the faith has suffered from the inroads of secularism and the “eclipse of God.” Its focus, therefore, will be among populations that have traditionally had a strong Christian identity, such as those in Europe and the Americas. Such places are strongly affected by secularism, by a tendency to give primacy to the values and practices of secular culture and to limit religious identity to a quaint, if fading, aspect of cultural identity or to wall off religious values and attitudes within a very limited sphere of action.

Places where God is in “eclipse” could also include much of Eastern Europe. People who have lived for decades under communist regimes may only have heard about God through hearsay or in stories told by grandparents or great-grandparents.

HEED THE COMMISSION

This is certainly the way Archbishop José Gomez—the newly-installed coadjutor-archbishop of Los Angeles—understood the “new evangelization” when he wrote a pastoral letter to the people of San Antonio, Texas—his former see—in February. Addressed primarily to lay people, his pastoral letter encouraged all the baptized to embrace evangelization as a “duty of delight, a duty we carry out with joy and thanksgiving.” Proclaiming the Gospel is a “primary apostolate” for lay people, he wrote, one that they carry out by spreading and defending “the faith among their families and neighbors” and by bringing “the teachings of Christ to bear on the issues facing their communities.” It is, he said, a duty to which we are called at Mass, when, nourished by the gift of Christ’s Body and Blood, we “heed the commission every one of us receives at the end of every Mass—to go out into the world to love and serve the Lord.”

In the process of re-evangelization, Archbishop Gomez encouraged believers to “talk to our brothers and sisters about what is keeping them from the Church” and to affirm “Christ’s living presence in his Church and in his sacraments.” In addition to emphasizing the power of personal witness, Archbishop Gomez indicated a shift today from old forms of evangelization. The new evangelization, he suggested, includes that focus on personal witness, but it also calls attention to the need for healing that people may experience. Two aspects of this approach highlighted by the archbishop are the witness of personal happiness “found . . . in communion with Christ in his Church” and compassion.
DIALOGUE WITH THE CULTURE

Pope Benedict has also been promoting new ways to approach evangelization, frequently evoking the example of Matteo Ricci in this year when the four hundredth anniversary of his death is being remembered. This missionary priest from Italy, Pope Benedict has observed, brought the Gospel to people in China by learning their culture and finding ways to dialogue with them in their own language while he lived and worked among them (1582–1610). Ricci began his mission, Pope Benedict said in an audience on June 2, with a “profound love” for China and its ancient culture. His proclamation of the Gospel was then marked by a Christian humanism that gave Ricci an approach that “considers the person inserted in his [or her] context, cultivating the moral and spiritual values, making use of all that is positive in the Chinese tradition, and offering to enrich it with the contribution of the Western culture but, above all, with the wisdom and truth of Christ.”

In imitation of Ricci and other missionaries like him, this approach—of learning the language, immersing oneself in the culture, remaining there for many years (and, perhaps, for life)—has become standard for the “old evangelization” as well as being proposed as a model for the “new evangelization.” Missionaries are trained to deal with local problems, to promote regional cooperation, and even to work with mass media and new technology. With the rapid urbanization of poorer countries, many missionaries now live and work in cities rather than in rural communities, where many people used to live, and they are tackling typical urban problems like lack of housing, broken families, street children, and migration.

MISSIONARY WITH A FAMILIAR—AND UNFAMILIAR—FACE

In an interview with Catholic News Service (“Vatican Letter,” John Thavis, May 28, 2010), the secretary of the Congregation for the Evangelization of Peoples, Archbishop Robert Sarah, noted that the decline in the number of priests in traditionally missionary religious orders (centered in Europe and the United States) and the increase in new priests and seminarians in some former mission countries has led to a change in the “face” of evangelization. Where missionaries with European and North American heritage and features once evangelized, he said, now “we try to favor a South-to-South cooperation, for example, priests from one African region evangelizing in another part of the continent.” He pointed especially to the example of Nigeria, where there are more than 4,500 seminarians, many of whom may serve as missionaries in other African nations.

That fact has led to what another Catholic News Service story by Mark Pattison (“Josephites,” June 1, 2010) calls “an example of reverse mission: young African men leaving their homeland to pursue ordination as Catholic priests in a religious order that has no missionary presence in Africa but a long-standing ministry to African Americans.”

Before ordination, these priests must go through the kind of inculturation process lauded in Matteo Ricci’s approach and promoted for priests and religious going to missionary lands. In a program that begins in their homeland and continues in the United States, they learn how to adapt to the local food, conversation styles, and other aspects of Catholic as well as secular culture in the United States.