HOW’S IT GOING?

We’re now more than five months into praying with the Roman Missal, third typical edition, and its new translation, so I think it’s a good time to ask: How’s it going for you?

I must admit that the transition to the new texts has been for me more a time to deepen my love for the spirituality of the liturgy than one of frustration or reticence. That has surprised me because I so loved the translation with which I was familiar after more than twenty years of ordination and forty-five years in liturgical ministry. I have not experienced what some presbyter friends have described as anger every time they open the missal, or disgust with the new translation, or such great frustration that they have been tempted not to use the new translation or to retire. I even heard a story about a pastor who, on the First Sunday of Advent, began to pray the collect and then stopped abruptly. He took the missal out of the acolyte’s hands, threw it across the sanctuary, and proclaimed: “This is not prayable!”

Please don’t get me wrong. I understand the frustration that comes with needing to take time to prepare praying texts for which, I believe, another alternate was in place (the translation approved by the English-speaking bishops’ conferences in 1998) that also would have invited a deepened liturgical spirituality but which would have sounded more like the English with which many of us are more familiar and comfortable. At times the new English translation sounds like the exercises that those of us who studied Latin experienced in introductory Latin grammar class. I understand that, for some people, the missal symbolizes the injustice that occurred during the translation process. I understand that we, ordained and lay members of the Church, approach this missal from vantage points marked by diverse feelings and opinions. However, I still repeat how I began this article: I have found working through the transition to the new missal to be a time for deepening my love for the spirituality of the liturgy more than one of frustration or reticence.

REINFORCEMENT

At one of the workshops I gave to clergy on the chants in the new Roman Missal during the past year, one of our brothers commented: “I think singing is really going to help me pray these prayers in a way that people will be able to hear them and enter into them.” I have found this to be true, so I have been singing the presidential prayers since we began using the new book. Taking time to prepare for singing these prayers has helped me reflect on the texts and the liturgy they help us to celebrate. Mind you, it has not always been easy to do this. I have wandered into neighboring musical tones at some points, but using the simple tone to proclaim the prayers has helped me pray, and people have told me how it has helped them hear
the words and enter into the prayers more readily.

This feeling was reinforced for me during Holy Week and when we celebrated the sacred Paschal Triduum. I presided at the services of Holy Week and the Triduum in Great Bend, Kansas, with the Dominican Sisters of Peace and their Triduum assembly. This community has had a strong liturgical life for many years. Their beautiful Dominican Chapel of the Plains was designed with the guidance of Adrian Dominican Sisters Barbara Chenicek and Rita Schlitz of INAI Studio. Both the community and its chapel made Holy Week a sacred space and time for prayer.

Even finding the Prefaces of Palm Sunday of the Lord’s Passion and the Mass of the Lord’s Supper where they are now placed in the book helped the prayer flow more naturally for me in a way I did not expect. Some of the language of the translation invited new connections: “His Death has washed away our sins . . . .” The connection between Christ’s dying and baptismal waters seemed stronger in this translation than the older “By his dying he has destroyed our sins.” And, while I mourn the loss of “By his rising he has raised us up to holiness of life,” I found the new phrase—“and his Resurrection has purchased our justification”—a way of making clear that Christ has already justified us, that is, put us in right relationship with God and all creation.

Following the suggestion to receive the oils blessed at the Chrism Mass at another appropriate time, we received them in Great Bend at the beginning of a Mass during which we celebrated the anointing of the sick. We were able to receive and use the oils in the same liturgy, which spoke strongly to all of us gathered that day. Most parishes would not have such a celebration during Holy Week, but receiving the oils as part of the liturgy of the hours on Holy Saturday instead of at the beginning of the Evening Mass of the Lord’s Supper, or during the retreat with the elect and candidates, would offer a similar intimate connection. Here the missal offers an opportunity for pastoral creativity and sensitivity that I believe we need to take advantage of whenever such moments arise.

Many changes were “only words” or “only rubrics,” but words and rubrics speak loudly. For example, calling the Holy Thursday procession at the end of Mass “The Transfer of the Most Blessed Sacrament” names the reality and reflects the distinction between celebrating the Eucharist and adoring or reverencing the Blessed Sacrament. Popular practice
is confusing the two, and in some places people do not learn that adoration always flows from and leads to celebrating Eucharist. A simple change can remind us to reflect on the distinctions that are part of our liturgical life. Distinctions are important, especially for people whose communion with God depends so strongly on words and gestures.

Another example of such a change is found in the Celebration of the Passion of the Lord on Good Friday. We now show and then adore the holy cross. “Showing” is what we do, whether by means of a procession, or undraping, or both. We “behold” the wood of the cross. “Behold” says: Pay attention, notice, look, gaze upon, or perceive. “Behold” as an imperative calls us to attention. This direct command invites a participation that is absent from the announcement that “This is the wood of the cross . . . .” And the new translation reminds us that on the cross “hung the salvation of the world,” not the “Savior” of the world. Please don’t get me wrong, I know that the Savior is the means of salvation, but “salvation” makes clear that Christ made the cross the instrument of salvation available for all. The assembly responds: “Come, let us adore.” To “adore” is to worship God; its Latin root means “to pray to,” but English usage has added a note of love to the word. “Adore,” more than “worship,” respects the polyvalent nature of what happens in this part of the liturgy. Adoring, as the priest celebrant (in my case) divested of chasuble and shoes, as the rubrics encourage, also spoke loudly to me and to this community. Some of the gathered assembly commented that my removing the chasuble and my shoes helped them connect the adoration of the cross with the washing of feet the night before. Others connected removing my shoes with Moses before the burning bush, standing on holy ground. Some others chose to remove their shoes, too. Hearing these kinds of connections invited me to look at the Missal with new eyes that deepened my spirituality and my respect for the liturgy which is our common spiritual director.

Approximately 100 guests gathered to celebrate the Mother of all Vigils with the community in Great Bend, and I was surprised by the number of people who commented on the new images that came to them from the Easter Proclamation. For some of them, the invitation to “exult” seemed stronger than “rejoice.” Inviting earth to “be glad” gave one assembly member a sense of creation dancing. “Let this holy building shake with joy” spoke strongly to a number of people. (I also asked them to make the walls shake when responding “I do” to the rejection of sin and renewal of baptismal promises.) One sister loved the connection with the Levitical priesthood evoked in the new translation. Another liked the clarity of the Scriptural references and the clear references to the Passover. Many appreciated the more inclusive language, and the mother bees were a hit! Having taught the Exsultet so many times at workshops during the past year, I enjoyed being able to sing and proclaim it within the liturgy. I did miss the phrase “What good would life have been to us, had Christ not come as our Redeemer?” “Our birth would have been no gain, had we not been redeemed” just was not as strong.

**How about you?**

If I were to continue, this article would be longer than it is already. So let me ask: What is your experience, five months into praying with
CONVENTION DISCOUNTS

Clergy/Musician Duo Discount. Clergy members and musicians who register for the convention together and in advance receive a discounted rate—a total savings for the two registrations of $170 off the regular rate between March 2 and June 22 (advance rate). The one clergy member and the one musician must be from the same parish or institution, and NPM parish membership must be current. Registration for both clergy and musician must be included together in the same envelope and postmarked on or before the advance registration deadline. Note: This discount is not available online.

Group Discount. NPM parishes with a current NPM parish membership who register in groups receive a discount. Registration forms must be mailed together with one check, postmarked by June 9. Chapter directors have received the information on chapter discounts. See the details for parish discounts in the January issue of Pastoral Music or contact the NPM National Office toll-free: 1 (855) 207-0293.

Youth Discount. NPM makes it easier to support your young musicians (twenty-one or younger or a full-time undergraduate) by offering a discounted rate for the full convention: $195 for advance registration (March 2 through June 22)—a savings of $50 off the regular fee. NPM membership (parish, youth, or individual) is required, and a parent or chaperone must accompany youth attendees under eighteen. Details are on page eleven of the convention brochure or online at NPM Convention.

CROSS-FERTILIZATION OF FORMS

When he allowed for a wider use of the Extraordinary Form of the Roman Rite, Pope Benedict XVI expressed the hope that “the two Forms of the usage of the Roman Rite can be mutually enriching” (Letter to bishops accompanying Summorum Pontificum, July 7, 2007). He certainly, however, did not intend the kind of actions commented on by Father Edward McNamara on the Zenit website (April 30, 2012). Father McNamara responded to a questioner from Bethlehem, Pennsylvania, who asked about extended elevations of the consecrated elements at the words of institution, when the priest “with arms raised full length,” holds the Host and the chalice “up as far as he can take them” for “almost two minutes.”

Father McNamara’s answer explains the difference between the “showing” at this point in the Eucharistic Prayer and the “elevation” during the doxology of the Prayer. He also explains that the Roman Rite “eschews exaggerated or dramatic gestures.” (You can read the rest of his comments at Zenit.)

Other practices from the Extraordinary Form have been creeping into the Ordinary Form in various places; they seem to be occurring most often during the Eucharistic Prayer. One priest in Baltimore, for example, has taken to keeping thumb and forefinger together after the institution narrative (a gesture difficult to explain to young people who have never seen it before). Another priest has added signs of the cross over the Host and the chalice during the Eucharistic Prayer’s doxology, thereby reducing what is intended to be the elevation while that text is sung.

This does not seem to be what Pope Benedict had in mind. Rather, he hoped that some of the riches of the Ordinary Form would be incorporated into the older ritual, and that the reverence with which the older form was (sometimes) celebrated would enrich the Ordinary Form. He wrote to the bishops: “The celebration of the Mass according to the Missal of Paul VI will be able to demonstrate, more powerfully than has been the case hitherto, the sacrality which attracts many people to the former usage. The most sure guarantee that the Missal of Paul VI can unite parish communities and be loved by them consists in its being celebrated with great reverence in harmony with the liturgical directives. This will bring out the spiritual richness and the theological depth of this Missal.”

The same might be said for the third form of the Roman Rite currently being followed: the Anglican Use adaptation that incorporates elements of both of the other forms of the Roman Rite.