

## Revision of the Text of the Mass (4)

It's funny how things can strike you, even when it's completely out of context. During the recent state visit to England of U.S. President Barack Obama, one political commentator said: "An event of this significance needs to galvanize our two bureaucracies to come up with something to say to make it all worthwhile" - in other words such a significant event called for an appropriately significant response. But it was the word *galvanize* that struck me.

By definition it means "to shock or excite into action" and for some reason, quite detached from the context of the state visit, it is a word that it seems to me is exactly what the Church hopes the revised translation of the Mass will bring about – not to shock, of course, but to excite and motivate. An event of this significance calls for an appropriately significant response. In his address to the bishops of England and Wales gathered at Oscott College during his 2010 visit to this country, Pope Benedict suggested what that response should be: "I encourage you now to seize the opportunity that the new translation offers for *in-depth catechesis on the Eucharist and renewed devotion in the manner of its celebration.*"

So why does the introduction of the revised text of the Mass offer such an opportunity? Why and how will it hopefully *galvanize* our Mass-going parish populations – galvanize us? Let's look first at the importance of, in the Holy Father's words, seizing this opportunity.

The clockwork mechanism of "Big Ben" in London operates non-stop, 24/7, all year every year, which makes it very difficult to carry out essential maintenance and repairs. It's only on those very rare occasions when the clock has to be stopped for some reason that specialist craftsmen can take advantage of the situation to do what they need to do before it is started up again. And when some great work of art needs major cleaning and restoration, it's the perfect opportunity for restorers to examine it in greater detail, perhaps taking X-rays to see if any initial sketches or corrected mistakes lie beneath the surface, analysing fragments of paint to see how the artist worked and so enable any necessary repairs to be carried out as perfectly as possible.

The introduction of the revised text of the missal is too significant not to make provision for essential "maintenance", "restoration", "inspection", and "renewal" in our approach to, and participation in, the Mass. A very deliberate effort has been made to reintroduce the richness and tradition of the language of the Mass lost in our current translation, and this could be wasted unless we also renew our appreciation of the liturgical context within which that language is used. There's no point in treating yourself to a high definition digital television if you are only going to watch analogue programmes, or of watching a game of

snooker in black and white if you could be watching it in colour. The Mass isn't meant to be used as a teaching tool, stopping and starting all the time to explain what is happening and why, and so, while the homily is meant to be a reflection on the scripture readings of the day, under the circumstances it would seem to offer the most practical space within the Mass, on a series of Sundays, to answer our Holy Father's call for "in-depth catechesis on the Eucharist and the manner of its celebration". (And in that regard, priests may have to allow themselves more than just a passing acquaintance with the instructions in the front of the Roman Missal - and the rubrics within the text - as an aid to their catechesis and practice.)

**In what ways then - and why - might this process galvanize us into an appropriately significant response?**

**L**et's say you have only ever taken your holidays in this country, but suddenly, out of the blue, along comes the opportunity to visit let's say Kenya. On the one hand you could treat it simply as a beach holiday, soaking up the sun at some resort or by the hotel pool. But then it occurs to you: what's the point? If you are going to go all the way to Africa, then surely it would be better to try to see something of the country, experience the culture and the local foods, and possibly even learn a few words of the language. It will make all the difference to your visit and to your experience of Africa.

**T**hat is what the Church is saying about the opportunity being offered by the introduction of this revised text of the Mass. If we simply "lie on the beach" and let all of this wash over us, then we are missing out on a tremendous opportunity to experience a renewal of our appreciation of what the Mass is all about. The question then is: in what ways might we need to experience such a renewal?

**C**onsider the following: What exactly is the priest doing at the altar? – because he is doing it on your behalf. What is the significance of the words he is praying? - because he is praying them in your name. Have you ever thought: if only I could have met Jesus in person... well you do. Or, if only I could have witnessed a miracle... you do. Or, if only I could have been at the Last Supper... you are. Or, if only I could have been on Calvary... again you are.

**C**onsider this too: Young people will say they are bored at Mass (are they bored *at* Mass, or *by* Mass?). Jesus Christ, Son of God, is really and truly present on the altar, as really and truly present as he was in Nazareth or Jerusalem...and yet they are bored? This is Jesus Christ, the Son of God, we are talking about...and they are bored? What do they expect him to do, come out in a clown suit and tell a few jokes?

The Church teaches that Our Lord is present in its liturgical celebrations in four ways: in the people gathered together for the celebration; in the person of the priest who celebrates; in the scriptures that are proclaimed; and in the bread and wine consecrated to his Body and Blood. Consider for a moment the awesome reality of this fourth presence. The priest extends his hands over the bread and wine and prays that the Holy Spirit will come down on them – and it does. And as he then repeats the words used by Our Lord at the Last Supper, they become the Body and Blood of Jesus – though under the appearance of bread and wine. He could come down in the form of his Almighty and All-Powerful Godhead, but we would probably die from the experience and so he “turns down the volume” a little and comes to us in a form we can handle – literally – but it is still Jesus Christ really present on our altar, THE greatest miracle of our faith...and our young people are bored?

Of course, if we are being honest, the problem isn't restricted just to our young people. Are we reluctant sometimes to get out of bed on a Sunday morning to go to church? Do we go because we have to be, or because we want to be? Do we find our minds wandering during Mass - is the Real Presence of Jesus Christ on our altar not enough to hold our attention? How do we put this right - what should the Mass mean to us?

This is what the catechism has to say:

At the Last Supper, on the night he was betrayed, our Saviour instituted the Eucharistic sacrifice of his Body and Blood. This he did in order to perpetuate the sacrifice of the cross throughout the ages until he comes again... The Eucharist is the source and summit of the Christian life, the sum and summary of our faith... By this sacrament we unite ourselves to Christ who makes us sharers in his Body & Blood... It is the making present and the sacramental offering of Christ's unique sacrifice, a memorial of his Passion and Resurrection... The Lord gave the command, 'Do this in memory of me'. We carry out this command by celebrating the memorial of his sacrifice. In so doing, we offer to the Father what he has himself given us... The Eucharist is an action of thanksgiving to God... Christians come together in one place for the Eucharistic assembly. At its head is Christ himself, the principle agent of the Eucharist. He presides invisibly over every Eucharistic celebration... The Eucharist unfolds according to a fundamental structure which has been preserved throughout the centuries down to our own day... As often as the sacrifice of the cross is celebrated on the altar, the work of our redemption is carried out... In the Eucharist, Christ gives us the very body which he gave up for us on the cross, the very blood which he poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Taken from para's 1322-1405 of the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*.

Every time we come into church, into the presence of the Blessed Sacrament, we are caught up in the mystery and fruits of the eucharist we celebrate. And when we leave again, we go out in the strength of the sacrament “to love and serve the Lord”.

**I**n their recent National Pastoral Letter<sup>2</sup>, the bishops of England and Wales wrote:

The publication of the new translation of the Missal is a special moment of grace in the English-speaking world. It offers an opportunity to deepen our knowledge and understanding of the mystery we celebrate each week. This itself will help us to move towards that fuller and more conscious and active participation in the liturgy to which the Church invites us. It will help us also to examine the dignity with which we celebrate the ‘source and summit’ of the Church’s life. The Eucharist is not something of our making but a gift received (1Cor 11 v 23). Like St Paul, therefore, let us receive it with reverence and care, knowing that we are being faithful to what the Lord himself passed on to the Apostles, which has been handed on since, in faithfulness, by their successors to every generation of the Church. Let us welcome the new translation as a sign of our unity and a powerful instrument of God’s grace in our lives.

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<sup>2</sup> (Sixth Sunday of Easter, 29<sup>th</sup> May, 2011)