

#7 LITURGICAL LANGUAGE

Since the Second Vatican Council the Church has had two different Missals. As we prepare to receive the third edition of the *Roman Missal* we need to discuss why a good translation is so vital for our liturgical prayer.

What is wrong with the current translations?

The prayer-texts we have been using since 1985 are good prayers that have nourished us and challenged us to be a Eucharistic community. These texts were translated according to the norms set down after the Second Vatican Council. As the Church has grown and prayed these texts we have become aware of ways to enrich and strengthen our liturgical prayer.

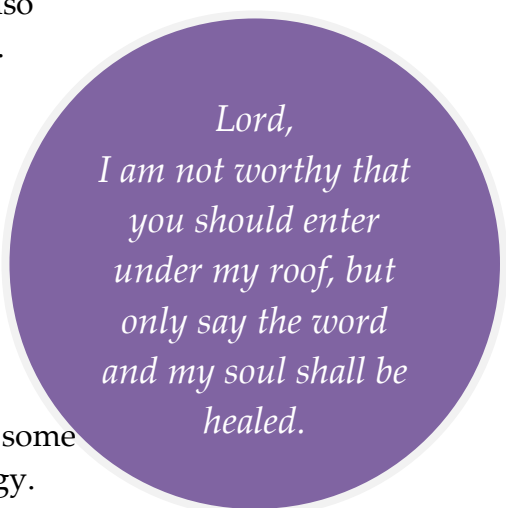
Why is having a “good” translation important?

Every day each of us says thousands of words. Some of these words are meaningless, while others are packed with meaning. Our words may be comforting or alienating, they may be technical or casual, and they may be hurtful or healing. For example, the simple phrase “I love you” can mean several things depending on the context. Is the exchange between spouses, parent and child, or two people reconciling old wounds? In each of these scenarios the love expressed is weighted and expressed differently.

Think about how language shapes you and its role in your daily activity. While teaching high school, I observed a phenomenon that affects each of us. Groups of friends that spent a considerable amount of time together began to speak in similar patterns, using similar phrases. This common speech also began to shape their viewpoints as they began to describe their experiences. We cannot escape language, and because it shapes us over time, it is important.

If this is true in secular settings, it is certainly true in sacred settings. We gather as groups who share similar thoughts and ideas. Our language at worship, though, is not everyday language. It is a scripted text, which helps us express our deep love for God, but also enlightens us, challenges us, and builds us into the body of Christ.

Liturgical language is a ritual language, which helps us enter into the celebration of the Sacred Mysteries. Ritual language helps unite us as one body and joins our praise and adoration for God in worship with the church gathered across time and space. When we enter into the worship space, in a sense, we enter into the sacred mysteries. It demands something different of us. Our words somehow mean more, and so the Church pays very careful attention to what words we use. In the next article we will look at some of the issues at stake in how we translate the language of the liturgy.



*Lord,
I am not worthy that
you should enter
under my roof, but
only say the word
and my soul shall be
healed.*