



Bulletin from the Diocese of Santa Rosa



The New Roman Missal: An Occasion of Grace

November, 2011

My Dear People of God:

The First Sunday Advent falls on the weekend of November 26-27. Besides being the First Sunday of Advent, which is significant enough in itself, this Advent marks the beginning of a new moment in the life of the Church in the English speaking world. On this Sunday a number of language changes will be implemented which have been a topic of active discussion in parishes and dioceses for more than a year and which have been the subject of translation work for a decade. While there has been some anxiety about what these changes will mean for the Sacred Liturgy I have no doubt that they will be very good for the Church and very good for a deepening of our understanding and appreciation of what Jesus does for us in the Sacraments, particularly the Most Holy Eucharist.

When we study the new translation of the prayers, which we will all have the opportunity to do when they are before us in our liturgy aids, we should notice that they more consistently invite us to an acknowledgement of the otherness of God, the God who is not us. The new translation places a greater emphasis on the centrality of God and his grace and our responsiveness to that grace. The focus in the present prayers tends to emphasize us and what we are doing. In addition, the elevation of language -- the increased richness of the language -- tells us that our Liturgical worship is not an ordinary, common, routine event. Our worship in the context of the Sacred Liturgy is intended to bring us into closer contact with God who is all holy.

While some of these changes affect the responses of the people, and this will take some getting used to, a vast majority of the work of adapting to the changes belongs to the priests. For them there are about a thousand pages of text that is significantly changed and absolutely new to them. It will be vitally important for each priest to take a few extra moments before every Mass to sit down and study the Mass texts to make sure that there is not some twist in the language that is going to cause him to stumble. At the same time all in the congregation are invited to engage more intently in the Sacred Liturgy by listening more carefully and, if necessary, following the text in the worship aids.

The First Sunday of Advent, the beginning of a New Liturgical Year and the beginning of the use of the new translation, affords us an opportunity to begin anew. This Advent is a particularly graced time for all in the Church. Besides the newness of the Liturgical Year, which we experience every year, we are this year being given something wonderfully new. A reading of the new translations and perhaps a comparing of the new with the old gives us the opportunity to ask, "How and why is this different?" I believe that if we do this we will find that the new translation offers a great opportunity for deeper prayer and reflection. We are constantly called to conversion, repentance and growth and the new translation, which literally provides us with an opportunity for a New Advent, will challenge some of our accustomed thought and behavior patterns. Hopefully this will lead us to a deeper intimacy with Christ. I pray it is so!

Asking every good grace and blessing of God upon you, I am

Sincerely yours in Christ Jesus,

Most Reverend Robert F. Vasa
Bishop of Santa Rosa