



First Sunday of Advent December 2, 2012 C

The New Mass Translations One Year Later

It has been one year since the new Mass translations were introduced. I thought it might be of some interest to you to share one magazine's survey of priests and people on how they feel about the new translations one year later. The following survey is taken from the December edition of *U.S. Catholic Magazine*, which is known to express the majority view of clergy and people in the U.S. a similar survey from a more conservative magazine would most likely have shown a much more positive outcome.

The view from the clergy

1. Which of the following responses best describes your current attitude as a priest toward the new Mass Translations?

58%: *I dislike the new translations and still can't believe I'll have to use them for the foreseeable future.*

17%: *I don't particularly like the new translations, but I've come to accept them, and they're not that big of a deal to me.*

9%: *I personally enjoy the new translations as much as, if not more than, the old version.*

4%: *I was unsure about it at first, but I've grown accustomed to the new translations.*

12%: *Other*

76% of the clergy (myself included) say that if there was an option, they would use the old translation.

I find myself agreeing with the first two responses above. I personally don't like the new translations, especially many of the opening prayers and prefaces, but as with all things, I work at accepting what I cannot change. I find much of the wording of the new translations awkward and clumsy. Like most priests, I wonder why the Vatican wanted to include words like *incarnate*, *dewfall*, *oblation* and *consubstantial* in the new translation. Praying for the Holy Spirit to come down upon the gifts of bread and wine 'like a dewfall'

sounds a bit strange since dew doesn't come down—it goes up.

While the majority of priests in the summary do not like the new translations, some praise it. One priest said he was 'overwhelmed with emotion' by the beauty and simplicity of the new text.

2. The most difficult part of transitioning to the new translation has been ...

- *Trying to make sense of some of the long phrases and new words that are not part of everyday vocabulary.*
- *The loss of the rhythm of language.*
- *Trying to explain, understand, and accept why this was a good and helpful thing to do.*
- *Staying positive.*
- *Being able to pray the texts meaningfully so that the congregation can participate in the prayer.*

I agree with all of the above comments.

3. One positive effect of the new translation has been ...

- *A richer, more authentic presentation of the church's prayer tradition.*
- *Some of the translations seem much more poetic.*
- *I prepare for Mass a little more carefully.*
- *It has reinforced my understanding of how important language is in the liturgy.*
- *A deeper awareness of the beauty of the liturgy.*
- *The new musical settings for the parts of the Mass.*

The only response I can identify with above is the last one. I especially like the way you have embraced the new musical arrangement for the Gloria.

The view from the pew

1. The following best describes my current attitude toward the new Mass translation:

49%: *I still dislike the new translations and am unhappy that I'll have to put up with them for the foreseeable future.*

17%: *I don't particularly like the new translations, but I've come to accept them and they're not that big of a deal to me.*

17%: *I personally enjoy the new translations as much as, if not more than, the old version.*

6%: *I was unsure about it at first, but I've grown accustomed to the new translations.*

11%: *Other*

2. The new translations have had a positive effect on my participation in and/or prayerfulness during Mass.

21% Agree - 70% Disagree - 9% Other

3. I wish we could just go back to using the old translations.

54% Agree - 29% Disagree - 17% Other

4. The most difficult part about the new translations has been ...

- *Understanding why it took so long to make the improvements!*
- *Awkward and non-felicitous translations. As a linguist, I find the new wording slavish in fidelity to the Latin.*
- *The tortured grammar and syntax of the Collects and the pretentious pomposity of some Prefaces.*
- *Listening to all the fuss about what are fairly minor wording changes.*

The last observation is true when we look at the translated responses of the *assembly*, but not so in the case of the priest's prayers. Every prayer we say has been revised. I am sometimes amazed that the old and new translations could be from the *same* Latin text. For instance, today's *Opening Prayer* (now called *Collect*) reads:

Grant your faithful, we pray, almighty God, the resolve to run forth to meet your Christ with righteous deeds at his coming, so that, gathered at his right hand, they may be worthy to possess the heavenly Kingdom. Through our Lord Jesus Christ, your Son, who lives and reigns with you in the unity of the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. (64 words)

The old translation of the same Latin text read:

All-powerful God, increase our strength of will for doing good that Christ may find an eager welcome at his coming and call us to his side in the kingdom of heaven, where he lives and reigns, with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. (49 words)

One thing we immediately notice is that the new translation is a lot wordier than the old one. The Latin text has only 24 words.

The least popular words in the new translation are: "consubstantial" (formerly translated "one in being" with the Father"); Jesus dying for "many" (previously "for all"); and "through my fault, through my fault, through my most grievous fault"—words that some see as piling on the guilt.

"For many" versus "for all"

For most people, the most controversial change in the new translations of the Mass is probably the phrase "*for many*" found in the words of consecration. The phrase seems to imply that Jesus did not die "for all people." Is this true? If we look at Matthew 26:28 and Mark 14:24, we see that they make specific reference to the "many" for whom the Lord is offering the sacrifice. Even though we use the words "for many," the Church teaches that Christ died "*for all*" people. Commenting on these two phrases, Scripture scholar Daniel Merz writes:

*The formula "for all" certainly corresponds to a correct interpretation of the Lord's intention expressed in the scriptures. Even more, it is a dogma of faith that Christ died on the Cross for all men and women (see John 11:52; 2Corinthians 5:14-15; Titus 2:11; 1John 2:2). However, the expression "for many" is a reminder that, while salvation is offered to all, there are some who do not accept it. Salvation is not imposed in a mechanical way, against one's free will or voluntary participation. It is freely offered **to all** to accept in faith, and **many** do indeed accept it. Some do not. As for those who apparently reject the gift, the Church entrusts them to the mercy of God.*

"Chalice" versus "cup"

Also, in the words of consecration, the new translation states that Jesus "took the chalice" whilst in the previous one, Jesus "took the cup." What is interesting about this change is that the *Scripture* account of the last Supper does state that Jesus "took the cup." So why this change? It seems 'chalice' is regarded as a more sacred term than the colloquial 'cup.'

I am wondering how you feel about the new translations a year later. If you care to share, please do so. My sense is that, as a parish, we have done a pretty good job of making the transition from the old to the new.

Like all things, we adjust to changes even as we admit that we may not like a particular change in our secular or religious world.

Have a blessed Advent Season,

Le Saran