

30th SUNDAY OF ORDINARY TIME – A (October 23, 2011)
(new Roman Missal translations – Biblical references)
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Has anything like this ever happened to you? you are out with family or a friend and you comment about what you think is some brand new building you have never seen before, only to be told that it was actually built some years ago? Or consider the poor husband who tells his wife (trying to be complimentary) how much he likes her new hairdo! only to be told "gee, thanks dear! I've had this hairdo the last six months." He gulps a time or two, and then desperately tries to change the subject. I'm told that seldom if ever works!

It is so easy to pass over things, to not notice or to take for granted that which surrounds us or that we encounter on a regular basis. We may sometimes wish, for example, that God would speak to us more clearly and more often so we could be guided by his truth and strengthened by his love and grace. In point of fact, however, God does speak to us! with both regularity and clarity. His word comes to us in a very special way through the Sacred Scriptures. Earlier this year Pope Benedict issued a document called Verbum Domini (Latin for "the Word of the Lord") which summarized the results of a recent synod of bishops on that subject. In that document the pope reminds us of a critical fact we may be tempted to take for granted: "the fact that God speaks and responds to our questions." He also expressed his hope that "the Bible may not simply be a word from the past, but a living and timely word."

It is certainly the work of the Holy Spirit that there is an ever-increasing hunger to learn more about the bible, especially on the part of my generation and older who perhaps did not receive as solid a grounding on the Bible as do our young people today. And one of the great benefits of Vatican II was to open up so much more of the Bible to be proclaimed at Mass than used to be the case. We now have a three-year cycle of three different readings at every Sunday Mass instead of just a one-year cycle of only two readings each Sunday. And this greater number of readings makes much more clear the close connection between the Old Testament and New Testament. Today's first reading, for example, is from the Old Testament book of Exodus and has the Lord giving Moses and his people some specific guidelines on how they were to treat one another. And in the gospel Jesus summarizes the whole of God's law by declaring the two great commandments: love of God with one's whole being and love of neighbor as oneself.

But you may not be as familiar with the fact that the rest of the Mass is also steeped in Sacred Scripture. The Lord's Prayer, the Our Father that we all know and pray in every Mass! this comes straight from the gospel of St. Matthew. The very fact of our Eucharist as sharing in Jesus' Body and Blood comes directly from the very clear testimony of the accounts of the Last Supper in the gospels and Jesus' command to the apostles to "do this in memory of me." And one of the special extra benefits of the new Roman Missal is that many of those biblical images or references that are in the original Latin will be much more obvious with the English translations which we will begin using next month. Two weeks ago I spoke about some of the wording changes in the Creed; last weekend we began learning the new musical changes! today I want to highlight briefly some of the new translations of your parts of the Mass that will make more explicit the strong scriptural foundations of the Mass. To help with this, I invite you to take a look now at one of those pew cards once again. As you do so, let me remind you again of the reason for this new translation (since the question keeps coming up): to give us a more accurate and literal translation of the official Latin texts of the Mass.

1. Today we began learning music for the new Gloria; notice the first sentence: "on earth peace to people of good will" instead of "peace to his people on earth." This new wording reflects more clearly the hymn of praise sung by the angels when the shepherds learned of the birth of Jesus in Luke 2:14. So

our song of praise to God will more closely unite us with the song of the angels as we together praise the One who created us all.

2. Returning for a moment to the Nicene Creed, note the end of the first paragraph our belief in one God, maker of all things visible and invisible instead of all that is seen and unseen. This is a direct link to St. Paul's letter to the Colossians (1:16) where he writes of God who created all things in heaven and on earth, the visible and the invisible, including the angels those spiritual beings who are not visible to our material eyes but who are nonetheless very real.

3. Invitation to Prayer (concluding the preparation of gifts): note the addition of only one new word of for our good and the good of all his holy Church. The Latin word for holy is in the official text, and so you will now say that word in English. We affirm that the Church is indeed holy even if her members and leaders sometimes act in distinctly unholy ways. This stems in part from Ephesians 5:27 where St. Paul expresses Christ's intention to make the Church holy and without blemish.

4. Preface Acclamation: you are already familiar with the new wording of the Holy, Holy: Lord God of hosts instead of Lord God of power and might. This is a direct reference to Isaiah 6:3 where the prophet received a vision of the angels in heaven praising God: Holy, holy, holy is the LORD of hosts. The word hosts refers here to the heavenly army of angels, and so our new wording preserves more clearly that biblical reference and we are more aware of the fact that we are joining the angels of heaven in offering praise to God.

5. Invitation to Communion (back of card): note the number of changes, both in priest's invitation and in people's response. The priest's words refer explicitly to John the Baptist's testimony to Jesus in the first chapter of John's gospel: Behold the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world. And your new response is quite different, but accurately translates the Latin: I am not worthy that you should enter under my roof. This in turn is a direct reference to that beautiful story in Matthew 8 where the centurion asks Jesus to heal his servant; when Jesus offers to go to his house, the centurion says Lord, I am not worthy to have you enter under my roof; only say the word and my servant will be healed. He knew his own unworthiness, but he also trusted in Jesus' power and desire to heal. Likewise, we cannot claim to deserve or merit the privilege of receiving Jesus in Holy Communion, but we also know and trust in his desire to nourish and strengthen our souls by this gift of himself. That is also why your new response concludes with I only say the word and my soul shall be healed instead of I shall be healed. The Latin text includes the word for soul besides, the Body and Blood of Christ brings moral and spiritual strength and healing something to be gratefully received by the human soul.

These are just a few of the new translations that highlight more strongly the biblical foundation of the Mass; there are many more in the various priest prayers. Let me conclude by referring for a moment again to Pope Benedict's document on the Word of God where he expresses his fervent hope that everyone would become increasingly familiar with the Sacred Scriptures since authentic spirituality is based on the Word of God proclaimed, accepted, celebrated, and meditated upon in the Church. That happens most fruitfully and powerfully in every celebration of the Mass, and the new Roman Missal will only enhance our ability to heed the Holy Father's challenge. May the sacred word of God take ever deeper root in our lives and our souls so that we will live that great two-fold commandment of love given to us by Jesus our Lord.

