

# Transitioning to the new Roman Missal

Part 8 in a series (Prepared for St. James Cathedral, Seattle by Corinna Laughlin)

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In the early years of the Church, the Eucharistic Prayer was not written down. "The one who presides over the assembly," wrote St. Justin Martyr, "makes a long eucharist for having been judged worthy of these good things" (c AD150). St. Hippolytus said, "It is not necessary that the bishop take up the formulas which have been consigned higher up as though he had to force himself to say them by heart in his thanksgiving to God. Let each one pray according to his capacities. If someone is capable of praying a long time while uttering a solemn prayer, that is good... provided that his prayer is sound and conforms to orthodoxy" (c AD215).

With the passage of centuries, certain prayers came to be written down and shared, and the practice of improvised prayer became less and less common. By the 11th or 12th century, in the Roman Catholic tradition, this rich variety was gone, and just one prayer was used for the celebration of the Eucharist – the prayer we know today as Eucharistic Prayer I, the "Roman Canon."

That continued until November 30, 1969, when the revised Roman Missal containing the reformed liturgy was published. The revised rites included four Eucharistic Prayers. The Roman Canon continues to be the first option, now supplemented by Eucharistic Prayer II, based on the most ancient existing text of the Eucharistic Prayer, from the Apostolic Tradition of Hippolytus; Eucharistic Prayer III, a new composition; and Eucharistic Prayer IV, which is based on ancient Eastern anaphora (Eucharistic Prayers). In the years since the Council, these prayers have been further supplemented by two Eucharistic Prayers for Reconciliation and a Eucharistic Prayer for Various Needs and Occasions.

The new translation of the Eucharistic Prayers – in particular, the new translation of the words of consecration – have been the subject of much discussion.

## WORDS OF CONSECRATION

On the day before he was to suffer, he took bread in his holy and venerable hands, and with eyes raised to heaven to you, O God, his almighty Father, giving you thanks, he said the blessing, broke the bread and gave it to his disciples, saying:

TAKE THIS, ALL OF YOU, AND EAT OF IT, FOR THIS IS MY BODY, WHICH WILL BE GIVEN UP FOR YOU.

In a similar way, when supper was ended, he took this precious chalice in his holy and venerable hands, and once more giving you thanks, he said the blessing and gave the chalice to his disciples, saying:

TAKE THIS, ALL OF YOU, AND DRINK FROM IT, FOR THIS IS THE CHALICE OF MY BLOOD, THE BLOOD OF THE NEW AND ETERNAL COVENANT, WHICH WILL BE Poured OUT FOR YOU AND FOR MANY FOR THE FORGIVENESS OF SINS. DO THIS IN MEMORY OF ME.

*From Eucharistic Prayer I (the Roman Canon)*

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The translators of the new Roman Missal chose to use the word "chalice" instead of "cup," both because the word has its roots in the Latin word "calix," and because it is a word that is not in daily use. In *Liturgiam Authenticam*, the 2001 Vatican instruction on which the new translation is based, this is the recommended practice: "If indeed, in the liturgical texts, words or expressions are sometimes employed which differ somewhat from usual and everyday speech, it is often enough by virtue of this very fact that the texts become truly memorable and capable of expressing heavenly realities" (LA, 27).

The use of the word "many" has also generated much discussion. It is an accurate translation of the Latin "multis," and reflects the Gospel accounts as well--Matthew 26:28; Mark 14:24. Scripture scholars emphasize that the use of the word "many" in this context

"does not mean that some are excluded"; rather, it "is a Semitism [that is, a characteristic of the language Jesus spoke] designating the collectivity who benefit from the service of the one, and is equivalent to 'all'" (Catholic Study Bible, p. 1291). (It is worth noting that some other Christian liturgies – the Episcopal Church, for example—already use this wording in their Eucharistic liturgy.)

The word "many" is sure to cause confusion. In English, the meaning of "many" is unequivocal: it means a large number, even a majority, but it does not mean "all." Does that mean that when the priest prays the words of consecration that Christ's blood was poured out not for *all*, but for *many* people? The answer is a resounding *no*. Christ came to take away the sins not of many, but of *all*: he "takes away the sins of the world," we will pray in a few moments. It is at the core of our belief that Christ is the Savior, not of some but of all humanity, and that he died on the cross out of love not just for those who know his name, but for all people. And it is that all-embracing love we should call to mind when we hear these words at Mass.