

THE NEW ROMAN MISSAL . . . A BRIEF HISTORY

- Remember that the Church in the United States will begin using the New Roman Missal on the **FIRST SUNDAY OF ADVENT, 27 NOVEMBER 2011.**
- In previous Bulletin Inserts, we've discussed the general reasons for the New Missal, and presented a brief overview of iterations of the Missal (The Sacramentary) in the Post Vatican II Era.
- It seems appropriate, then, to present a brief "history" of the collection of prayers which has become the **NEW ROMAN MISSAL.**

In the earliest centuries of the Church, there were no formal books/texts specifically devoted to *prescribed* liturgical prayers, texts, or other instructions for the celebration of the Mass. It is important to remember that the Faith of the Catholic Church was – and still is – articulated in Liturgical Prayer; and, because that is true and extraordinarily significant in the Life of the Church, there was need for consistency and authenticity in the words used in the celebration of the Liturgy. . . much more consistency and authenticity than was being provided absent a formal document. As with most things in life, generally, and in the Life of the Church, in particular, development is not rapid; and the gestation of collections of Liturgical Prayers for use in particular locations and situations such as for Local Churches (Dioceses), Particular Monasteries, even for the Holy Father Himself was gradual, occurring over centuries as the Church began to develop its own "Self Concept." Such collections were contained in *libelli* ("booklets"). These *libelli* were, over centuries, drawn together into larger collections of prayers.

Eventually, those larger, more organized collections of prayers were assembled into *liber sacramentorum* ("sacramentaries"). These Sacramentaries contained some, but not all of the prayers of the Mass. The earliest of them has been attributed to Pope Leo I, "Leo the Great" (440-496), and to Pope Gelasius (492-496), but surviving versions of those sacramentaries date from centuries later. Other early manuscripts (such as *Ordines Romani*) contained detailed descriptions and instructions of and for the celebration of the Mass. Those *Ordines Romani* seem to have developed into what we now call the *rubrics* for the celebration of the Mass. Liturgical books grew as they passed from one Diocese or Monastery to another, often

with prayers and instructions being added in the margins or in blank spaces in the text. Of course, these texts were compiled through the laborious process of copying by hand; and that, many times, led to inconsistencies and errors.

Amidst all this development, sharing, copying, we find the first true liturgical books which we can call **MISSALS**, and not surprisingly, in Monasteries beginning in about the 12th and 13th Centuries. A **MISSAL** contained not only the **PRAYERS**, but also the **READINGS**, the **CHANTS**, and the rubrics for the celebration of the Mass. Although it is difficult to trace the exact origins of the *first Missal*, the first book we find bearing the name **MISSALE ROMANUM** appeared in 1474 – in the same century as Johannes Gutenberg (1440) invented the printing press. But it was not until after the Council of Trent that Pope Pius V, in 1570, promulgated an edition of the **MISSALE ROMANUM** declared obligatory for use throughout the Latin Church. This marked the first official attempt at uniformity in the celebration of the Mass in the, then, almost 1700 year history of the Catholic Church.

Since that time, to accommodate the ongoing evolution and development of the Liturgy, seven Popes following Pope Pius V have promulgated new editions of the **MISSALE ROMANUM**: Pope Clement VIII (1604), Pope Urban VIII (1634), Pope Leo XIII (1884), Pope Benedict XV (1920), Pope John XXIII (1962), Pope Paul VI (1970), Pope Paul VI (1975), Pope John Paul II (2002). In addition, there were a number of other minor revisions to the text, published as “reprints,” directing minor changes to Liturgical Prayers, Chants, and Rubrics. Pope Pius XII, in 1955, promulgated revisions to the rites of Holy Week and to the Sacred Triduum. Most recently, Pope Benedict XVI incorporated in the **ROMAN MISSAL** a number of additional prayers, including those for recently canonized saints and for the celebration of an extended Vigil for Pentacost.

The **MISSAL** we will begin using on 27 November is an English translation of the Latin contained in the **ROMAN MISSAL PROMULGATED** by Pope John Paul II. New translations of that **MISSAL** have been published in each of the world’s major languages. Purpose: to provide more general uniformity in Liturgical Prayer, Chant, and Rubrics for the Universal Church; and to insure more faithful adherence to the Latin Roots of the “**NEWEST**” **ROMAN MISSAL**.