



Praying the Mass Anew

*The New Translation of The Roman Missal
and Our Actual Participation at Mass*

5. Praying According to the Words Requires Listening Well.

In preparing for the new translation of *The Roman Missal*, we will necessarily focus on the words themselves. However, our preparation for the new versions of the prayers would not be complete unless we consider *how we are to prayerfully listen*.

Surely in our own human relationships, we all know that listening is *not always the same as hearing*, and that not listening well has consequences – ask any parent if you need proof of this point. In the liturgy, a key element in our *active participation* is the capacity not simply to hear, but to truly listen to all that is to be heard, whether spoken, sung, or made by sounds of musical instruments, bells, etc. Though many parishes have hymnals or missalettes that contain written versions of most, if not almost every word of prayer, such written resources can not claim to convey the full value of the sung or spoken sound meant to be heard by listening. How important is it that we listen well? How can good listening lead us to a deeper encounter with God?

One of the most useful ways to consider listening at Mass is to consider the Mass itself as a dialogue. In this dialogue, those who are speaking include God himself (especially in the Gospel), the priest, other ministers, and the people

in the congregation. We can even identify how each individual recipient of Holy Communion contributes words. The spoken words may be directed toward God, to one particular person, to a particular set of people, etc. As our words are meant to communicate with others, it is essential that the intended audience of the words is not only able to hear them, but is ready to take in their full meaning by listening well. Here is an example:

At the very beginning of Mass, the Sign of the Cross (both in words and as a gesture) initiate the Mass as an act of prayer offered unto God himself. The greeting of the people by the priest is meant directly for the people, who, having listened to the words of greeting, give the fitting response to the priest (this very dialogue will be covered in some detail in a later article). The greeting is followed by the invitation to “acknowledge our sins” so that we are ready to celebrate the sacred mysteries of the Eucharistic sacrifice. The tone of these words, meant as they are for the whole congregation (including the ordained minister/s), serves more as a directive to act than as a prayer in itself. Conscious listening to these words will effect whether or not each person acts

accordingly – by silently calling to mind any sins that they may have recently committed. The prayer that follows (“The Confiteor” [“I confess to almighty God...”]), or the invocations followed by the words “Lord, have mercy”) are spoken unto God himself, mindful of how each individual says the words, as members of the one body, the Church, in public worship. *Through our proper listening to all of the words that lead to this moment of prayer, we are made ready to pray the words with their proper intention.* When there is a failure to listen, the intent of the words risk being lost all together, or being less than what their full value invites. Hence, it is by way of listening that we are able to actively participate in

this prayer (and any prayer or response at Mass) to their fullest degree. Listening well can (and does) lead us to encounter God more fully and consciously in the Mass.

As we continue to prepare for praying the Mass anew with the new translation, we can already begin and continue to *practice listening*, properly focusing our attention on every spoken word in listening and in responding to each word in the most fitting manner. By our ability to listen well, our participation in the Mass, especially through the new prayers, can be raised to a higher level, opening ourselves to a deeper, more meaningful encounter with Jesus Christ.

Questions of the Week:

➤ ***Why doesn't every parish have the same hymnal or missalette?***

While the practice of the people using a “missal” or “missalette” dates back to days prior to Vatican II, the last 40 years have witnessed an increase in these types of books, both in the number of different companies producing them, along with varied features in each company’s versions. Each different missalette or hymnal has its own strengths and weaknesses, often discerned and chosen by individual parishes according to their sense of what will be most useful, not to mention cost effective.

Hymnals, because of their permanence (and hopefully higher quality of materials used in publishing) are truly more fitting than missalettes, which are replaced seasonally or yearly. Since different companies produce these books, a real problem is that the collections of hymns are not always consistent. In the future, there is hope that consistent versions of hymns will be published by ALL publishers, leading to a more consistent selection of music that all parishes can use.

In considering the use of missalettes or hymnals, it is important to keep in mind that these books are “tools” to *aid in the participation of the people*, and should never be seen as a necessity for parishes. Truly, all people, with time and consistent participation in Mass, are able to learn the proper prayers and responses by memory and learn to listen well to the prayers spoken by the priest. Such a standard of knowing our prayers and knowing how to listen is truly of highest value when it comes to entering into the Mass in the most proper way (along with a way to save parishes from the expense of purchasing missalettes).

➤ ***What advice is there for those who do not hear so well, or when the priest may be difficult to understand?***

One of the great blessings of the liturgy is that it is meant to be celebrated in a consistent way in each and every place. Hence, even though some do not hear well anymore, the ritual itself can still have an effect since it will remain familiar. Likewise, if one is having difficulty understanding the priest’s words, the consistency of other priests with whom they have participated in the Mass can help to provide the words.