



Pentecost Sunday 12th June 2011

Introduction to the new Order of the Mass



Diocese of Cairns

Forty years ago people had lots of coins in their pocket or purse. Now it is all notes and credit cards. Coins through constant use and rubbing together lost their mint condition - their sharp images and clear inscriptions.

Words are like these old coins. Through frequent use they lose their sharpness or their freshness.

For forty years now, we have been using the same words, the same translation, in the prayers of the Mass. Through constant use they now may have lost some impact.

With church buildings of the 1960s and 70s (our cathedral is a good example), the fashion then was for straight and simple. So too the style and use of words: short simple sentences and a spare use of extra words (adjectives or qualifiers.)

The first work of the translation of the Mass into English was a significant achievement. Yet almost as soon as it was finished, its shortcomings became apparent and work started on expressing the fuller and richer sense of the prayers. This has been a long drawn out process, with conflicts and compromises. No translation is ever perfect or pleases everyone!

The most noticeable change for us now may be the response to "The Lord be with you." We have said simply "And also with you." which seems very even and equal. Now we will return to saying "And with your spirit."!!

This sounds odd and old fashioned! Yet it is a more exact translation. "Spirit" suggests your inner or deeper self!! Surely that is where the Lord does touch us and is with us!

Another change is unusually briefer and more curt. Immediately before the Preface, we said "It is right to give Him thanks and praise." Now we say simply "It is right and just." This connects neatly with the opening words which the priest immediately prays in the Preface itself "It is indeed right and just"

Another major change is with the Creed. We have been saying "We believe ...", which richly suggest that "We" are one community united in our shared Christian Faith.

However Faith is intensely personal. It is the belief held in our inner most or deepest self. I can only claim that I do believe. The questions

asked at Baptism, Confirmation and at the Easter Liturgy are answered "I do." I can only speak for myself - not for others!!

The prayer before receiving Communion, has always been in the intimate first person: "Lord I am not worthy ...". I can only humbly say that of my own self. This prayer has now been enhanced with the fuller Gospel incident – the Centurion's humble words to Jesus coming to cure his dying servant: "Lord I am not worthy that you should enter under my roof, but only say the word and my soul [again my inner, deepest most self] shall be healed." (*Matt 8:8*)

The large white laminated cards now on our church seats give all these new changes in our responses at Mass. Later in the year, when the full new Roman Missal is available, further changes will be noticed, but these will be with the words the priest prays. This will be a major challenge for celebrants who know now almost by heart the prayers which we have said for most of our ministry.

However the immediate challenge will be today: Pentecost Day 2011. All of us, people and priests, have to adjust our responses at Mass, from what has become so familiar during most of our lives. "Old habits do die hard!!"

Yet the first Pentecost had its miracle: healing the confusions in human language, which Scripture vividly locates in the building of the tower at Babel (*Gen 11*). This confusion is overcome with the Spirit-filled preaching of the Apostles: "We heard them preaching in our own language about the marvels of God" (*Acts 2:11*)

As an old teacher/lecturer, I have a very practical pedagogical suggestion. When we first learned to read at school, we did not go to the next story in the old Queensland Reader until fully familiar with - and even bored by - that story for the day or the week! Now it might be better and easier for us to stay with the first option for a month or so, until we have "got it." Then we may move on to the next choice.

Hopefully we may avoid some of the "babble" which occurred at "Babel"!

+James Foley