

*What's New About the Roman Missal?*

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In the last “The Liturgical Life” entry (June 10, 2010), we looked at the meaning of “*Roman Missal*,” which has lately become a significant news item. The term “missal” refers to the book containing all of the necessary instructions and texts for the celebration of the Mass. Since the book is used only for the Mass of the *Roman Rite*—versus, for example, the *Byzantine Rite*—it is further called “Roman,” the liturgical tradition to which most western Catholics belong.

When we hear that there is a “new” *Roman Missal*, what should we understand? What, in other words, is “new” about the *Roman Missal*?

There are two principle ways in which the upcoming *Roman Missal* can be described as new. First, our next *Roman Missal* is a *new edition* of the *Roman Missal* published by the authority of Pope Paul VI in 1970; specifically, it is the third typical edition of the *Roman Missal*. The second way in which the future *Roman Missal* is said to be new is in its translation of the English-language texts from the original Latin texts. While most of the texts of the *Missal*, especially in the Latin language, have not changed between the second edition (published in English in 1985 and which we use currently) and the third edition, the methods for translating them and the tenor of the English translation that results are different.

It's the first of these reasons—the new edition—that we'll begin to look at today.

The history of the *Roman Missal*, while itself a long one, can be treated here only briefly. In the first centuries of the Church, liturgical prayers did not exist in any unified collection, even though their content and general structure were present. St. Justin Martyr (d. 165), in fact, describes the priest as praying in words “to the best of his ability.” Gradually texts were recorded, collated, and in limited ways published into what were sometimes called “Sacramentaries,” books that contained to greater or lesser degrees the texts of the Mass. Pope St. Leo the Great (d. 461), Pope St. Gelasius (d. 496), and Pope St. Gregory the Great (d. 604) each give their names to early editions of the Roman Sacramentaries.

The first book to contain every Mass text—instructions, prayers, readings, chants—and actually be called a “*Roman Missal*” was that published in 1474, shortly after the invention of the movable type printing press (the first Gutenberg Bible was completed in 1455). The Council of Trent (1545-1563) called for the revision and publication of a new *Roman Missal*, and in 1570 Pope St. Pius V promulgated the Tridentine Missal (“Tridentine” is the adjectival form of “Trent”).

Since 1570 there have been revisions in subsequent editions, the last being those of Pope John XXIII in 1962. The most notable change in this Missal was the addition of the name of St. Joseph, husband of the Virgin Mary, to the Roman Canon (Eucharistic Prayer I).

In January of 1959, less than three months after his election as Pope, John XXIII announced his intention to convene another Council. The Second Vatican Council opened in October 1962, and its first document, the “Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy” (*Sacrosanctum concilium*) was promulgated on December 4, 1963. It was this document, and the application of its principles by the group called the *Consilium*, that would lead to a new order (*novus ordo*) of the Mass and give us the *Roman Missal* of Pope Paul VI in 1970. Next time we will trace the history of this Missal.