

*The New Roman Missal*  
by Christopher Carstens  
June 3, 2010

On March 25, the Solemnity of the Annunciation, the Holy Father approved the English language edition of the *Roman Missal*. While the *Roman Missal* will most likely not be used in the parishes of the United States until the beginning of Advent next year (Sunday, November 27, 2011), there is a great deal to know about the new *Missal* and its new translation. In this and in future articles, we will examine various facets of the *Missal* that can help make it for us a true means to encounter Christ in the Mass.

What is a *Roman Missal*?

The *Roman Missal* is the book that contains the all the necessary texts and instructions of the celebration of the Mass according to the Roman Rite. Let's unpack this definition a bit.

By "missal" is meant the book used at the Mass, and it takes its name after the Mass itself. "Mass," in Latin, is *missa*, and signifies a "sending forth" from the celebration and into the world. The whole celebration, in other words, takes its name from the act of sending: this should indicate to us just how important it is to "Go and announce the Gospel of the Lord" (which is one of the formulas for the sending, *missa*, in the new *Roman Missal*).

The "Roman" in *Roman Missal* refers to Roman Rite of the Latin, or Western, Church. The Catholic Church consists of a number of self-governing Churches, also called "Rites" (and this can be a point of confusion, for the term "rite" is used in a variety of different ways in the Church). Each Church bears the marks of its local geographical culture, has distinct liturgical practices, and maintains its own structure of governance (although each Catholic Church is in communion with Rome and the Papacy, unlike the Orthodox Churches). In the East there are 21 different traditions, including the Byzantine, Ethiopian, Maronite, Ethiopian, and Albanian. In the West there is only one such Church, which is called the Latin. But within that one Latin, or Western, Church, there a number of liturgical rituals in use, such as the Ambrosian used in Milan, the Mozarabic in Toledo, Spain, and the Roman, which is by far the most widespread of the liturgical rituals used. In short, the term "Roman" signifies the Roman liturgy of the Western Church.

What is in the *Roman Missal*?

The *Roman Missal* we see today has three principle divisions: (1) the *General Instruction of the Roman Missal*, which, as its name suggests, gives the directions about how to prepare for and celebrate the Mass; (2) the *Norms on the Liturgical Year and Calendar*, as well as the actual liturgical calendar itself; and (3), the actual texts and rubrics of the celebration of the Mass. It's this last section, the prayer texts and rubrics, that constitute the majority of the *Roman Missal*. In the Latin edition, for example, it constitutes some 1200 pages. This section is also that which will be most noticeably changed in its translation (but more on these specific changes in the issues to come).

The readings for the Mass, while by extension belonging to the *Roman Missal*, are now found in separate books, the Lectionaries. The official music books of the Mass, the *Roman Gradual* and *Simple Gradual*, are also separate books. In both cases, though, it is the *General Instruction of the Roman Missal* and the rubrics of the *Roman Missal* that direct their use.

In our next article, we'll look at the extent to which the upcoming *Roman Missal* can be called "new" and why a new edition is needed at all.