

400 years after the Council of Trent, the Second Vatican Council promulgated the first of 16 documents on the Church and her life in the modern world. The *Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy—Sacrosanctum Concilium*—provided a number of principles and norms for the reform and restoration of the sacred liturgy. These principles, presented in seminal form in the *Constitution*, would guide the process of liturgical reform generally, and the work of liturgical translations particularly.

To understand the upcoming (and even present) Missal that we will use, it is necessary first of all to grasp the Council's liturgical principles that produced it. Presently, we'll look at three principles that are especially relevant to translations: unity, adaptation, and noble simplicity.

1. Unity. One of the Council's stated aims, expressed in its opening lines, is "to foster whatever can promote union among all who believe in Christ" (SC, 1). A liturgical celebration is a sign of unity. For this reason, every element of the Mass—vesture, postures, ministers, and language—is to reflect the unity of the Church itself. While Catholics value the dignity of the individual, they likewise esteem their union within the one Body of Christ, the Church. Liturgical language, consequently, must reflect and cause unity within the Church. While we in Wisconsin may not speak a given manner of English language, we are united in our liturgy and its language with English speakers around the world, such as Pakistan, New Zealand, and the Philippines. "And so, the *Roman Missal*," concludes its *General Instruction*, "though in a diversity of languages and with some variety of customs, must in the future be safeguarded as an instrument and an outstanding sign of the integrity and unity of the Roman Rite."
2. Adaptation. A second major goal of the Council and principle of reform is adaptation (see SC, 1) "Provisions shall also be made, when revising the liturgical books, for legitimate variations and adaptations to different groups, regions, and peoples, especially in mission lands, provided that the substantial unity of the Roman Rite is preserved; and this should be born in mind when drawing up the rites and devising rubrics" (SC, 38). An obvious example is the adaptation of the language of the Roman Rite—Latin—to the particular vernacular language of a given people. But while the Council allows, an even encourages, liturgical adaptation, it does so with the counterbalance of the "substantial unity of the Roman Rite." In other words, while the English language is a "legitimate variation" and is employed in the celebration of the Mass, the style and content of its expression is determined also by long-standing tradition of the Roman Rite. We can ask God to accept the sacrifice on the altar in the English language, but the expression is shaped by the Roman tradition: "In humble prayer we ask you, almighty God: command that these gifts be borne by the hands of your holy Angel to your altar on high in the sight of your divine majesty..." (Eucharistic Prayer I).
3. Noble simplicity. Another significant principle of reform is "noble simplicity": "The rites should be distinguished by a noble simplicity; they should be short, clear, and unencumbered by useless repetitions; they should be within the people's powers of comprehension, and normally should not require much explanation" (SC, 34). Too often, the expression "noble simplicity" has been interpreted as a reduction to the bare minimum, stripping the ritual expression to the commonplace. But the simplicity spoken of here is a "noble" one, that is, *worthy of being known*. The rites, moreover, are to be "distinguished" by such noble simplicity. The Latin word that is translated "distinguished" is *fulgeant*, literally, "let them shine" (a close English derivative is "refulgent," that which is radiant or brilliant). The rites—and here we could say our liturgical words—are to radiate, flash, and shine with that which is worthy to be known, namely, Jesus.

The liturgical language of the Mass oftentimes "sounds different" from the language we are accustomed to use in everyday life, but it does so for one simple reason: the supernatural world of the Mass *is*

*different* from the natural world of earth. The Mass fosters unity, while our culture emphasizes individuality. The Mass values legitimate variations in the context of traditional unity, while our culture most often values diversity apart from tradition. The Mass and its words radiate *the Word*, Jesus Christ, while our cultural speech is often mundane, expressing the speaker only.