



The Revised *General Instruction of the Roman Missal:*

Questions and Answers

Part I

With the promulgation of the revised *General Instruction of the Roman Missal* (also known as *GIRM*) by Pope John Paul II on Holy Thursday 2000, the Most Reverend Stephen E. Blaire, Bishop of Stockton, declared 2001 as a year of liturgical catechesis to prepare for the reception and implementation of the third edition of the *Roman Missal*. Through diocesan and regional workshops and bulletin inserts, the clergy and faithful reviewed the liturgical principles that underlie the rites revised by order of the Second Vatican Council.

With the publication of the third edition of the *Roman Missal* on March 22, 2002 and the Holy See's confirmation of the American adaptations of the *GIRM* and the *Norms for the Celebration and Reception of Holy Communion Under Both Kinds in the Dioceses of the United States*, both approved by the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, the time has come to implement these new or amended liturgical norms. At the same time, and in accord with norms in the *GIRM* and canon law, Bishop Blaire has exercised his authority to make adaptations to the *GIRM* for the Diocese of Stockton.

Bishop Blaire has set Sunday, June 22, 2003, the solemnity of the Body and Blood of Christ, as the date to implement the revised *General Instruction of the Roman Missal* as well as the national and diocesan adaptations. Through a series of workshops and bulletin inserts, the clergy and faithful will be informed of the specific changes made to the liturgical norms as well as the values underlying the norms.

In this first series of bulletin inserts, we will explore the various liturgical books the Church uses

in the celebration of the Eucharist and the subject of liturgical law, especially as it relates to the interpretation of the new and revised norms.

What is the *Roman Missal*?

The *Roman Missal* is a ritual book containing the prayer texts used by the presiding priest for the celebration of the Eucharist.

Prior to the Second Vatican Council, the *Roman Missal* contained both the readings from Scripture and the prayer texts for Mass. However, in light of the expanded three-year cycle of Sunday readings and two-year cycle of weekday readings, the decision was made in the revised liturgy to publish two separate liturgical books. The readings for Mass were published in the *Lectionary for Mass*; the Mass prayers remained in the *Roman Missal*, generally called the *Sacramentary* in English.

The third edition of the *Roman Missal*, like the two previous editions, is divided into several parts. In the front of the Missal, one finds the various decrees of the Holy See promulgating the *Roman Missal* as well as the *General Instruction of the Roman Missal* and *Norms for the Liturgical Year and Calendar*. The first part of the book contains the prayer texts (opening prayer, prayer over the gifts, and prayer after Communion) for the seasons of the year. The next section of the Missal has the ordinary texts used at Mass, e.g., forms for the penitential rite, the Eucharistic Prayers and prefaces, solemn blessings, and specific rubrics for each part

of the Mass. The proper Mass texts for the celebrations of the saints are provided next in chronological order. Lastly come Mass texts grouped under various titles: commons (e.g., various texts in honor of the Blessed Virgin Mary, pastors, or holy men and women), ritual Masses (Christian initiation or marriage), various needs and occasions (for the Church or the sick), votive Masses (for the Trinity or St. Joseph), and Masses for Dead.

The *Roman Missal* is published by the Apostolic See in Latin for the universal Church. For any celebration of Mass in Latin, the new third edition replaces the 1970 and 1975 typical editions of the *Missale Romanum*. It belongs to conferences of bishops to translate the Latin prayer texts and rubrics into vernacular languages.

What is the *General Instruction of the Roman Missal*?

The *General Instruction of the Roman Missal* (*GIRM*) is an extended introduction to the *Roman Missal* that provides a theological foundation for the celebration of the Eucharist and directions for carrying out the ritual. The *GIRM* outlines the structures and elements of the Mass and then considers the various offices and ministries in the liturgy. Norms are provided for the celebrations presided over by one priest as well as concelebrated Masses. The *GIRM* concludes with norms for the arrangement and furnishing of churches, the choice of Mass texts, and adaptations that are the competence of the diocesan bishop and conference of bishops.

If the *Roman Missal* is published in Latin, what is the process to get a version in English?

With the publication of the third edition of the *Roman Missal* in March 2002, conferences of bishops are given the task of preparing vernacular translations. Since the International Commission on English in the Liturgy (ICEL) was formed during the Second Vatican Council, this mixed commission has undertaken the process of translating all liturgical books into English for the member and associated episcopal conferences.¹

After completing the translation of the documents and texts of the Missal, ICEL will submit the proposed English translation to the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops for its approval. Upon approval by the USCCB, the document will then be sent to the Congregation for Divine Worship and the Discipline of the Sacraments for the *recognitio* (or confirmation). Not until the English translation has received the *recognitio* from the Holy See and the text has been promulgated by the USCCB can it be used in the celebration of Mass.

Can changes be made to the norms in the *Roman Missal*?

Pope John Paul II approved the third edition of the *Roman Missal*, including the revised *GIRM*, in 2000 for the entire Church. Outside of those cases permitted by the norms themselves, changes cannot be made to the prescriptions contained in the *Roman Missal*.

Note

¹ As required by the instruction *Liturgiam authenticam* on the authentic translation of the liturgy, ICEL is in the process of reorganizing its structure.

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