



The Revised *General Instruction of the Roman Missal:*

Questions and Answers

Part 2

Is the *Roman Missal* binding law everywhere in the world?

Canon 838, §2 of the Code of Canon Law states that the Apostolic See has the responsibility to issue liturgical books for the entire Church. The third edition of the *Roman Missal* is an example of such a liturgical book and is binding law everywhere in the world as universal law. It should be noted, however, that specific norms can be adapted by the episcopal conference or diocesan bishop in accord with the *General Instruction of the Roman Missal*, nn. 386–399.

Does the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops (USCCB) have any authority to make liturgical changes to the *GIRM* or *Roman Missal*?

Not only does the Code of Canon Law permit the bishops' conference to make adaptations to the *Roman Missal*, the *GIRM* itself expressly allows for this. The reason for this is simple: while the Supreme Authority of the Church orders the liturgy for the entire Church, there is also a recognition that the spiritual good of the faithful requires that the liturgy be attuned to the genius and culture of different peoples.

In accord with the authority granted it, the USCCB approved *Adaptations of the Institutio Generalis Missalis Romani, editio typica tertia for the Dioceses of the United States of America*. The Adaptations received the *recognitio* (confirmation) of the Holy See on 17 April 2002. The adaptations made by the USCCB touch on the following areas:

the posture of the faithful; the choice of texts used for the entrance song, responsorial psalm, and Communion song; the sign of peace; materials for altars, sacred furnishings, and vessels; special days of prayer; musical instruments and approval of musical settings.

The USCCB also updated the prescriptions for the distribution of Communion under both kinds. The new document, *Norms for the Distribution and Reception of Holy Communion Under Both Kinds in the Dioceses of the United States of America*, was approved by the USCCB on 14 June 2001 and received the *recognitio* of the Holy See. This text replaces *This Holy and Living Sacrifice: Directory for the Celebration and Reception of Communion Under Both Kinds*, approved by the US bishops in 1984 when Communion under both species was introduced.

Does the diocesan bishop have authority to make adaptations to the *Roman Missal*?

Yes. *GIRM*, n. 387 grants to the diocesan bishop competence over the discipline of concelebration, norms for altar servers, the distribution of Communion under both kinds, and the construction and ordering of church buildings. In addition, several of the adaptations approved by the USCCB and confirmed by the Holy See for the Dioceses of the United States leave to the diocesan bishop the determination of the particular norm.

At Bishop Blaire's direction, and in accord with universal and particular law, the diocesan Liturgical Commission has proposed several adaptations of the

GIRM for the Diocese of Stockton. After consulting with the Presbyteral Council, the Bishop has approved the diocesan adaptations of the *General Instruction* and decreed that they be implemented along with the norms contained in the revised *GIRM* and US adaptations beginning with the Sunday Masses on 22 June 2003, the solemnity of the Body and Blood of Christ.

Can the priest in my parish make changes in the liturgical norms?

Unlike the Missal of Pius V (1570), the Missal revised by Paul VI in 1970 permits priest-celebrants to choose among several options of ritual actions and texts during certain parts of the Mass. Clearly a priest cannot move the sign of peace to another time during Mass or move the Veneration of Cross to the end of the Solemn Celebration of the Lord's Passion on Good Friday. However, on most Sundays, the choice of a Preface and Eucharistic Prayer are left to the presider's discretion. In the same way, while the ritual gives to presiders the freedom to craft their own introductions "in these or similar words," that permission is not extended to the ritual texts themselves.

Won't it confuse everyone to have people following different laws when they travel?

One of the insights from the Second Vatican Council is that unity does not equal uniformity. In other words, we don't all have to do the same thing the same way in order to be unified. The Church recognizes that, while preserving the "substantial unity of the Roman Rite," there is room "for legitimate variations and adaptation to different groups, regions, and peoples" (*Sacrosanctum Concilium*, n. 38).

Those who have participated in Mass in other countries already know that the liturgy, while clearly the Roman Rite, has been adapted by the local conference of bishop and diocesan bishop for the faithful of that place. Even in our own country, liturgical practices vary legitimately from one region to another because of the authority given to the diocesan bishop to order the liturgy for his particular

Church. An analogy might be helpful: just as Americans are governed by different civil jurisdictions (federal, state, and municipality), so are Catholics governed by three tiers of norms: universal law for the entire Church, particular law for the dioceses of a nation, and particular law for the diocese. Yes, some norms may differ from one diocese to the next, but so do laws differ from one state to another.

While it may be confusing to some to have different liturgical norms from diocese to diocese, one must remember that the Church entrusts liturgical authority to the diocesan bishop to moderate, guard, and promote the liturgy according to his competence. Indeed, the adaptations and other modifications of liturgical practice Bishop Blaire has made for the Diocese of Stockton will promote a common liturgical discipline among the parishes of the Diocese, a desire many people expressed during the Year of Liturgical Catechesis.

Glossary

Apostolic See (or Holy See): the Roman Pontiff and his offices located at the Vatican in Rome.

Episcopal Conference: a regional (usually national) group of bishops.

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