

WHAT THE BISHOPS DID

On the occasion of the Spring meeting of the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, the *Catholic News Service* ran a story with the headline “Bishops approve new Order of Mass with U.S. adaptations.” That is an unfortunate headline, as it is not accurate and will unnecessarily, although understandably, upset a good number of Roman Catholics.

I am saddened that our own news service has gotten it wrong. When the Bishops of the United States, or any other country, work for a more authentic translation of texts connected with our Eucharistic celebrations, they are not changing the order of the Mass. What we have is a linguistic difficulty, particular to English. Latin is much more precise, and it is that original text to which we Bishops must strive to be authentic as to the meaning and understanding.

The question is not what do we say, but how do we say it. As Bishops, we would never presume to change meaning. Rather, we struggle to express the truths held worldwide by Roman Catholics in a way that will be authentically understood by American Catholics who speak their own brand of English. The challenge is to return to the authenticity of the past in a way that can be understood today.

Some of the changes in wording that you will notice were requested by the Holy See. Among them are these: “And with your spirit.” That will replace “And also with you.” One that is in the Creed is “I believe.” That replaces “We believe.” Those of us who remember the Father Stedman or the Saint Andrew missals of yesteryear will not be surprised. That is the wording used there.

Were the American Bishops wrong in adopting the translation of the Mass that we use today? No. Actually, the Holy See approved it. Shortly after the Second Vatican Council, the Holy See issued rules that encouraged relatively free translations emphasizing adaptation to forms of expression in another language. However, in 2001, the Holy See issued new rules that now require liturgical translations to follow the original Latin more strictly and completely.

Our worship, particularly the Mass, needs to remain faithful to that of the Universal Church. It is the Bishops’ role continually to seek the most authentic words in which to express that worship. The fact that the precise meaning of our words changes from time to time ought not to alter what we believe. Therefore, it is important that the words we use in worship accurately express those beliefs and that they do so for each generation.

This return to some of the former wording in the Mass will not be implemented immediately. The texts first require the approval of the Holy See. Please do not expect something different from that to which you are accustomed already next Sunday, or next month, - maybe not even next year.

The point that I wish to make is that there is nothing here over which to get upset. It is not a new order of Mass. Rather, it is an adjustment in language, in order to express our beliefs more authentically. Will Roman Catholics in the United States ever have to go through this again some day? It is most likely that they will. That is due simply to the fact that languages change.