

## **A Plea to Those Who Don't Like the New Roman Missal (2011)**

Brian Abel Ragen

Brothers and Sisters:

Please stop complaining about the new translation of the Roman Missal. I know you don't like parts of it. There are a few places I myself find a little awkward. But there are many more parts of the 1971 translation that I find grating. On the whole, I really like the new translation. I like that it is more like the translations used in other languages, that it is more like the Latin Catholics of the past knew, that it is more elevated and less conversational. I know that those may be among the reason you don't like it, but I would like you to consider a couple things.

First, the people who made this decision did it carefully and after long thought. That wasn't so true of the 1971 translation. You don't like it that a lot of those people are in Rome, while that doesn't bother me. But the translation is a good piece of work that deserves our respect. Second, the decision has been made, and fussing instead of cooperating will not do anyone any good. As the cops say, you might as well come quietly.

Finally, and knowing your commitment to fairness, just consider this: it's my turn.

You have had your way all my life. I am in my early 50's, and I long for solemnity and dignity in worship and for solid theology. For all my life the Church that was supposed to give me that has provided something else. And it has done it to keep people like you happy.

You have made me sit through masses improvised by anyone who pleased, no matter

how questionable their command of the English language or Catholic doctrine. Anything, from original sin to subject-verb agreement was apt to be eliminated it so we would seem more “with it.”

You have made us the audience while priests pretended to be Bob Hope or Johnny Carson or Jay Leno working the crowd. “Good morning” replaces, “The Lord Be With You,” jokes and asides to favored members of the audience can be inserted anywhere, and the hand-held microphone lets these wannabe Oprahs work the room and get out into the crowd.

Priests, cantors, lectors, anyone who has been able to get hold of a microphone has been allowed to treat us as his audience instead of as members of the Church assisting at her common act of worship. And half the time they are just telling me what should simply be printed in the service leaflet!

You have given me a spiral bound hymnal that asked me to sing a version of “Jeremiah was a Bullfrog” in church. (“Jeremiah was a Prophet, Moses was a prophet too . . . “) That was when I was in college, but things almost as bad have happened since.

You have fooled with every old hymn from every denomination to make them bad poems and bad theology. You have cut the word “wretch” from “Amazing Grace,” the “Frail Children of Dust” from “O Worship the King!,” and the “worm” from “Alas, and Did My Savior Bleed.”

You have made me tell the world how great I am: I am the Light of the World. Peace on Earth is going begin with ME, not with Christ. Everybody’s Going to Know I’m a

Christian by MY love. And I know those are fibs!

You have forbidden me use the traditional second person singular while talking to God, even though no one had trouble understanding it when we thee'd and thou'd Him. (You also get testy when I capitalize his pronouns.)

You have had me listen to the people offer petitions that belonged on a bulletin board ("For all those who will gather for RCIA training this Friday at noon...), in the agony column ("For my brother, who will not forgive our parents...), or the Op-Ed page ("For the success of the demonstration in favor of..."). You have expected me to say "We pray to the Lord" after petitions for the enactment of policies I didn't support and the victory of teams for whom I didn't root.

You have put me in the middle of rows of people who want to hold hands with me during the "Our Father" and raise our linked arms in a "Banzai!" gesture at the doxology. The "aerobic Our Father" always makes me feels like one of those jerks at the ballpark who does the wave instead of watching the game. And having to hold hands with anyone makes my skin crawl. (That reaction disappears only if I am in the midst of an overpowering crush or atop a precipice.)

You have made me look at people whose smiles radiated "smarm" instead of joy. And you've done it at funerals!

Speaking of which—you have subjected grieving people to parades of impromptu hagiographers telling jokes about the dead or presenting them as paragons who didn't need a savior. Why you couldn't save the stuff for a place where there would be booze to

deaden the embarrassment I can't imagine.

And you haven't stopped in church. You have turned every secular ceremony into the sort of party I can't stand. I am a college professor, and you have turned commencements into toga parties with air-horns and Frisbees. Civic events—from the State of the Union address on down—have followed the same pattern, where no one is able to “actively participate” by paying quiet attention.

You have had your way my whole life. To begin with, you claimed it was to “bring in the young people.” That was when I was a young person. It put me on anti-depressants. It drove young people out of the church in droves. (And they find the new renewal music, which often sounds like the score of an animated musical, just as hokey as the folk masses.) Now I'm at the end of my career, the young people think I'm an old man, and you are still doing it!

You have had your turn. You got you to destroy the Mass that moved your parents and grandparents, making it almost impossible for them to hear a Tridentine Mass for decades. You didn't implement Vatican II's documents on the liturgy as they were written. None of that stuff of the treasury of sacred music and the pride of place of the organ for you! You did what you pleased for 40 years and didn't spare a thought for those of us who wanted a dignified, solemn, orthodox mass. You suggested were all just uptight, or had OCD or Asperger's, or wanted to say “thou” only because of our covert racism or fascism. You were the only true Christians, and we could tell it by your love. Or we could have, if you hadn't so hated Latin, grammar, chant, rubrics, the bishops, and everyone who defended them.

Okay. That's all in the past now. All is forgiven. We ask no apology, no recompense, nothing to make up for all the years of pain. All people like me ask is that you let us have our turn. Deal with losing your precious 1971 translation just the way you wanted people to deal with losing their Tridentine Mass or with all your various experiments: that is, just do it and be quiet. Let us have our way just a little bit for a change. We trust you took the Lord seriously and did as you would be done by. Now prove it.

And if we can get your parish to get a real hymnal to replace the newsprint collection of pabulum, go along with us there, too. It's our turn.

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