



A Pastoral Letter on the Liturgy

Bishop Donald Bolen
Diocese of Saskatoon



November 14, 2011


Dear brothers and sisters in Christ,

On November 27th, the first Sunday of Advent, along with English speaking (Latin Rite) Catholics the world over, we will begin using a new English translation of the Roman Missal. We will also implement the changes called forth in the new General Instruction on the Roman Missal (GIRM). Your Pastors and Parish Life Directors will lead you through this transition, but as they do so, I want to send this brief message to you.

The Eucharist is at the heart of our Christian lives. As the new GIRM states, “all the activities of the Christian life... are bound up with it, flow from it, and are ordered to it” (§16). We are beginning the season of Advent, a time of preparation to celebrate the birth of Jesus, God Incarnate who comes to dwell among us. It is in the life, death and resurrection of Jesus that God ultimately redeems us, reveals to us His Face, and summons us into the very life of the Triune God. Just as in the Incarnation Christ draws near to us, so too in the Eucharist the Lord continues to come to where we are, to invite us into life with God. In the Mass, we are drawn into the paschal mystery, the saving death and resurrection of Christ, and we receive what we are called to become, the body of Christ. The Eucharist instructs and refreshes us, so that we might learn to offer our very selves, as faithful disciples of the One who gave himself that we might have life (cf. GIRM §§28, 95).

In recounting the events of the Last Supper, St. Paul tells us he is passing on to us what he himself received (1 Cor. 11:23). Likewise, the new Missal is seeking to pass on the faith in its integrity, to pass on to next generations that which we have received (cf. GIRM, §397). While there will be many changes which come with the new Missal - changes in the wording of prayers, in the responses of the congregation, in the sung parts of the Mass, and in posture - what we are doing in celebrating the Mass has not changed, nor has the basic structure and content of the Eucharist changed. As Church, we continue to pass on that which we have received from the Lord.

Yet most changes present difficulties and challenges, especially when they pertain to that which is most dear to us. So this period of transition is going to require effort, patience, and a willingness to work together, in order to maintain our unity in the Spirit. But this period of transition also offers an opportunity for enrichment and deeper understanding of the treasure we have in the Eucharist. The new GIRM states: “The Bishop should therefore be determined that the Priests, the Deacons, and the lay Christian faithful grasp ever more deeply the genuine significance of the rites and liturgical texts, and thereby be led to the active and fruitful celebration of the Eucharist” (§22).


 In all things we are *rooted in Christ*,
in His desire to bring God's love to all peoples.

I would like to highlight briefly some aspects of the new Instruction, to supplement what you will receive from the leadership in your parishes.

- Faithful to the liturgical renewal brought about by the Second Vatican Council, the new GIRM notes that each Eucharist is to be celebrated “in such a way that it leads to a conscious, active, and full participation of the faithful, namely in body and in mind, a participation fervent with faith, hope, and charity” (§18; cf. §5).
- We are invited to strive for “the greatest reverence and adoration” in our Eucharistic celebrations (§3). In several places, the GIRM stresses that our liturgies should be characterized by beauty, dignity, and a ‘noble simplicity’.
- A heightened attentiveness to the Word of God is called for, since “in the readings, as explained by the Homily, God speaks to his people, opening up to them the mystery of redemption and salvation, and offering spiritual nourishment (§55; cf. §29).
- We are invited into a deep reverence during the Eucharistic Prayer, which “is the highpoint of the whole celebration” of the Mass (§30). All of life “is sanctified by the divine grace that flows from the Paschal Mystery” (§368), hence we are to celebrate the Eucharist in such a way that we are drawn deeply into the life-giving and saving mystery.
- As changes in gesture and posture are introduced, we are invited into a deeper understanding of how each movement and posture expresses something of our relationship with God. “The gestures and bodily posture of both the Priest, the Deacon, and the ministers, and also of the people, must be conducive to making the entire celebration resplendent with beauty and noble simplicity, to making clear the true and full meaning of its different parts, and to fostering the participation of all” (§42).
- The GIRM calls for brief periods of silence (in the penitential rite, after each invitation to pray, after the readings and homily, and after communion) in order to foster an inner quiet and prayerfulness in our celebration of the Eucharist.
- Finally, while there is room for great diversity in the Church, the GIRM stresses that we are united under one God, and as brothers and sisters in Christ, our liturgies are to reflect that unity. Gathered for the Eucharist, the faithful “are to form one body, whether in hearing the Word of God, or in taking part in the prayers and in the singing, or above all by the common offering of the Sacrifice and by participating together at the Lord’s table. This unity is beautifully apparent from the gestures and bodily postures observed together by the faithful.” (§96). To the extent that it is possible, therefore, we are invited to be united - in the Spirit, and in our words, gestures and posture - as we begin using the new Missal and implementing the new GIRM.

In closing, I want to express my confidence and trust in the Priests and Parish Life Directors of the Diocese, who will explain the changes to you in greater detail, and (with the help of pew cards and other resources) assist your communities in this period of transition. I ask your patience and cooperation in this whole process, and encourage you to see it as an invitation and opportunity to ponder and understand more deeply the rich treasure which we have been given in the Eucharist.

Yours in Christ,



† Donald Bolen
Bishop of Saskatoon