

National Catholic Welfare Conference.
Bishops' Commission on the Liturgical Apostolate
The use of vernacular... ADG 0464

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**BISHOPS' COMMISSION ON THE LITURGICAL
APOSTOLATE**

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National Catholic Welfare Conference
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BISHOPS' COMMISSION ON THE LITURGICAL APOSTOLATE

I. Understanding Liturgical Texts in the Vernacular

The Constitution on the Liturgy, issued by the Second Vatican Council, states that it is of the highest importance that the faithful understand the rites because the sacraments “not only presuppose faith but by words and objects they also nourish, strengthen, and express it;” moreover, “they do indeed impart grace, but in addition, the very act of celebrating them most effectively disposes the faithful to receive this grace in a fruitful manner, to worship God duly, and to practice charity” (59). Another basic principle taught by the Constitution is that “Christ is always present in His Church, especially in her liturgical celebrations.” Among the ways He is present is “in His word, since it is He Himself who speaks when the Holy Scriptures are read in the Church.” He is present also “when the Church prays and sings, for He promised: ‘Where two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst of them’ ” (7).

The widespread interest in the Council and particularly in the discussions on vernacular in the liturgy have prepared the people for changes. Many are filled with hope for a great advance in meaningful participation by all the people in the sacred rites. At the same time it is evident or will soon be evident that beyond use of the language which the people understand there must be developed an understanding of the “language” of the liturgy in a deeper sense. No one can find the meaning in the allusions to Abraham’s bosom or to Jerusalem in the funeral rites unless he knows Abraham as our father and Jerusalem as the place of God’s presence with His people, the prefiguring of the Church on earth

and in heaven. We all know how necessary is a grasp of Scriptural idiom to understand the Epistles. This is also necessary to appreciate the use of water, oil, bread, and wine, and to know the significance of such phrases as "new and eternal covenant" and "Lamb of God." The simple phrase, "through Christ our Lord," or "through Him and with Him and in Him," expresses a direction in devotion, a union with Christ's worship of the Father that is not yet the spontaneous manner of praying among our people. The same is true of praying the psalms as Christian prayers.

Understanding the liturgy is not merely a matter of vocabulary or of remembering Biblical events. Christ's earthly life followed in large part its Old Testament prefigurings and He established the basic rites of His Church on the basis of meanings already indicated in the Scriptures. He made the inspired psalms and canticles His own prayers. His great act of worship and sacrifice for mankind, "the paschal mystery" (5, 6, 47, 61, 102, 106), was intended as a new Exodus, a passing from this world to the Father, and it took place at the time of the Passover celebration.

Because of the Scriptural basis of liturgical language and actions, the Constitution on the Liturgy provides for more extensive reading of Scripture in the liturgy and also for the integration of preaching with Scripture. It states that the sermon is part of the liturgical service and that it "should draw its content mainly from scriptural and liturgical sources, and its character should be that of a proclamation of God's wonderful works in the history of salvation, the mystery of Christ, ever made present and active within us, especially in the celebration of the liturgy" (35).

The Constitution also states that Bible services should be encouraged (35) which include of their nature a sermon on the texts read to the people and said or sung by them. And it states that it is essential to "promote that warm and living love for Scripture to which the venerable tradition of both eastern and western rites give testimony" (24)—a love which may be possessed by the simplest as well as the most learned members of the Church, as history shows us.

Since, as the Constitution states, it is now a primary pastoral duty to enable the people to take their full internal and external part in the liturgy (14, 19), it is clearly our duty to equip our-

selves at once to carry out this task and to begin to carry it out among our people. Providentially, the Scriptural, catechetical, and liturgical renewals of recent decades have already produced an abundance of reading matter, at many levels, which can serve to enrich our basic structure of rites and prayers and, at the same time, help us to inform our people. A brief bibliography of some basic books which serve both these purposes is included herewith.

But what is most necessary of all is that we begin, if we have not begun already, to meet with Christ as He speaks to us through the liturgical rites and the inspired word of Scripture. This should best start with the use of the primal form of Christian “mental prayer” or “meditation,” traditionally known as “lectio divina”—(or, as we might call it in English, “praying the Bible.”) This means, very simply, prayerfully “hearing,” by slow meditative reading, a Biblical or liturgical passage as Christ’s word here and now: asking ourselves, for example, what is He telling us here about Himself, about the Father, about the divine plan for our own salvation and that of our people? How does He ask us to respond to this word of God’s love with Him, now in our prayer and also in our life?

Such a form of meditation, especially when the passages chosen are those which the priest is to explain and open out to his people in Sunday Mass, or at a baptism or wedding or funeral, or at a Bible service, will, experience shows, serve to integrate the priest’s prayer-life in itself and with his work for his people as “minister of the Word.” Any *study* of the liturgical texts and of sacred scripture then serves to enrich and deepen both the priest’s own prayer and worship and the sermons in which he opens out God’s Word to his people.

The question, obviously, is not one of making Biblical scholars either of all priests or of the faithful. It is one simply of restoring that living familiarity with Scripture and, through it, with Christ, which is our rightful inheritance.

Bibliography

Liturgy and Doctrine, by Charles Davis (New York: Sheed and Ward), short summary of rediscovered relationship between scripture, liturgy, doctrine and life.

The Liturgy and the Word of God (Collegeville: Liturgical Press; paper), a symposium covering all aspects of the subject.

The Psalms as Christian Prayer, by Thomas Worden (New York, Sheed and Ward). One of the best presentations of the Scriptural form and basis of Christian piety.

The Family and the Bible, by Mary Reed Newland (New York: Random House), provides valuable guidelines as to how to introduce the faithful to the Bible, in its relationship to the liturgy, to doctrine and to life.

Key to the Psalms, by Mary Perkins Ryan (Notre Dame: Fides), presents key themes, events, figures in the Old Testament and New Testament, in reference to the liturgy and Christian living.

The Bible Today (Collegeville: Liturgical Press; magazine).

II. *Reading and Praying in the Vernacular*

The introduction of the common language into liturgical rites is an event of numerous and important implications. Clearly it was the intention of the Fathers of the Second Vatican Council to provide the people with rites of sacred worship which would be meaningful and intelligible to them (36, 54, 63, 101, 113). Both those parts of the liturgy which instruct the faithful and those parts which express their prayer and devotion are to be spoken or sung in the vernacular language. This reform in our custom is intended to bring the people into more effective contact with the sacred scripture and the holy texts of the liturgy, thereby fostering deeper faith, greater knowledge, and more sincere prayer.

But these worthy objectives will not automatically be achieved by the use of the vernacular. Such prayer and readings will have to be done in a more meaningful and appropriate manner than has unfortunately been employed by some priests when reciting Latin texts. To celebrate the liturgy in a manner that is apparently hasty, matter-of-fact, and without attention to the meaning of the words would, of course, be irreverent and improper no matter what the language; however, when the vernacular is used, there is the greatest possibility of scandal. These observations, which must be honestly admitted, are commonly expressed whenever the vernacular is discussed and both clergy and laity are surely anxious

not only to avoid the danger but, first of all, to seek the fullest advantages the vernacular can bring. For this reason, the following comments are offered on the manner of speaking the English tongue in liturgical services, in the hope that they might serve as a guide to all. For the purposes of these remarks, there is a basic difference between reading the Word of God and reading other texts.

A. *Reading the Word of God*

All Scripture readings are to be proclamations, not mere recitations. Lectors and priests should approach the public reading of the Bible with full awareness that it is their honored task to render the official proclamation of the revealed Word of God to His assembled holy people. The character of this reading is such that it must convey that special reverence which is due the Sacred Scriptures above all other words.

1. It is of fundamental importance that the reader communicate the fullest meaning of the passage. Without exaggerated emphasis or affectation, he must convey the particular significance of those words, phrases, clauses or sentences which constitute the point being made. Careful phrasing and inflection are necessary to enable the listener to follow every thought and the relationships among them. Patterns of speech, especially monotonous patterns of speech, must be avoided, and the pattern of thought in the text must be adhered to. The message in all its meaning must be earnestly communicated.

2. The manner of speaking and tone of voice should be clear and firm, never indifferent or uncertain. The reader should not draw attention to himself either by being nervous and awkward or by being obviously conscious of a talent for dramatic reading. It is the message that should be remembered, not the one who reads it. The voice should be reverent without being unctuous, loud without shouting, authoritative without being offensive or overbearing. The pace must be geared to understanding—never hurried, never dragged.

3. By his voice, attitude, and physical bearing, the reader should convey the dignity and sacredness of the occasion. His role is that of a herald of the Word of God, his function to pro-

vide a meaningful encounter with that living Word. Perfection in this mission may not always be achieved, but it must always and seriously be sought.

B. *Praying and Speaking Aloud*

When the celebrant leads the people in prayer, or speaks to them, or addresses God in their behalf, his manner of speaking will differ somewhat in each case. In every instance, however, he should convey that he sincerely means what he says. This sincerity is crucially important; it makes the difference between a matter-of-fact, ritualized, indifferent celebration and one that is truly an expression of faith and devotion.

1. *Dialogue.* In the greetings and verbal exchange between celebrant and congregation, all participants should speak their parts with meaning. When the priest says, "The Lord be with you," for example, he must convey that he is really addressing the people, that he sincerely means the greeting, and that he invites response. The tone and inflection of voice must be natural and convincing. At the same time, dialogue should never become extremely informal; all must be aware that the words they speak are part of a sacred rite. The liturgy must always be characterized by dignity and reverence as well as meaningful and sincere speech.

2. *Prayer.* When reading the orations, preface, and the like, the priest should speak in a manner befitting his sacerdotal role. His tone of voice should be more formal, more reverent; yet he must remember he is speaking to a Person, not merely reciting formulas. Note that this applies no matter which language is used in the prayer; it applies equally to the Canon as to the Collect or the Lord's Prayer. The latter prayer is gravely abused by a sing-song recitation which pays little attention to the praises and petitions actually contained in the words. The conclusions of prayers, although in set formulas, must never be hurried, or routinely said. Since the affirmative response of the people is expected, the rhythm and tone of the priest should be sufficiently strong to encourage and facilitate the response.

III. *Extent of Liturgical Use of English*

The extent to which it is lawful to use English in the liturgy throughout the dioceses of the United States is determined in the

decrees of the National Conference of Bishops, enacted April 2, 1964, and confirmed by the *Consilium* for the implementation of the Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy in a rescript of May 1, 1964. The following paragraphs summarize and specify what is found in the decrees, which should be consulted for additional details. (The use of officially approved vernaculars other than English, although conceded by the body of Bishops, is dependent upon the judgment and permission of the individual local Ordinary in accord with n. 6 of the Decree).

A. *Divine Office*

The entire text of the Divine Office may be sung or said in English, according to the terms of the Constitution and the decrees. In the case of the clergy, however, the faculty to use English must be obtained from the Ordinary, local or religious. This permission is not needed if the cleric takes part in the Office with a group of the faithful or of religious who lawfully use the English Office.

The editions of the breviary in English issued by two publishers, Benziger Brothers and the Liturgical Press, have been approved by the Conference of Bishops.

B. *Sacraments and Sacramentals*

The entire rite of the Sacraments and Sacramentals, other than the Eucharist (below), may be celebrated in English, including the essential forms of the Sacraments. It is always required, however, that the approved text be used.

The text approved for the Sacraments and Sacramentals is the official *Collectio Rituum* newly edited and published. The Bishops' Commission on the Liturgical Apostolate has authorized four editions of the *Collectio Rituum*, issued by the following publishers: Benziger Brothers, Bruce Publishing Company, Catholic Book Publishing Co., and the Liturgical Press.

For the rites of the Sacraments and Sacramentals which are not contained in the official *Collectio Rituum*, the English translations found in *The Roman Ritual* by the Reverend Philip Weller (Bruce Publishing Co.) have been approved for liturgical use.

C. *The Holy Eucharist*

In the celebration of Mass it is lawful to use English in the lessons, in the prayer of the faithful, and in the ordinary and proper parts which pertain to the people. In sequence, the use of English and the retention of Latin for these parts may be enumerated as follows:

Entrance rite—Preparatory prayers at the foot of the altar—Latin

Introit antiphon—English

Kyrie—English

Gloria—English

Prayer or collect (including the introductory *Dominus Vobiscum* and *Et cum spiritu tuo*)—Latin

The Word of God

Epistle and other lessons—English

Gradual, Alleluia, and other chants—English

Munda cor meum, etc.—Latin

Gospel (including the introductory versicles and responses)—
English (Homily)

Creed—English

The Preparation of the Gifts

The Lord be with you and response, and *Let us pray*—English

Offertory antiphon—English

Silent prayers of the priest—Latin

Prayer over the gifts or secret prayer—Latin

The Eucharistic Prayer

Preface of the Canon (including the introductory dialogue and response beginning *Dominus vobiscum*)—Latin

Sanctus—English

Silent prayers of the Canon and the Conclusion—Latin

The Eucharistic Banquet

Lord's Prayer (with the invitation *Let us pray*, etc.)—English

Libera, quaesumus (with the versicle *Pax Domini* and response)—Latin

Haec commixtio—Latin

Agnus Dei—English

Silent prayers of the priest before Communion (and during the ablutions afterward)—Latin

Communion of the faithful (including *Behold the Lamb of God* etc. and the formula for Communion)—English

Communion antiphon—English

Post Communion (including the introductory *Dominus vobiscum* and *Et cum spiritu tuo*)—Latin

Dismissal (*The Lord be with you, Go, the Mass is ended*, etc. with the responses)—English

Placeat—Latin

Blessing—English

Last Gospel (including the introductory versicles and responses)—Latin

Where it is used, the “common prayer” or prayer of the faithful mentioned in art. 53 of the Constitution on the Liturgy may likewise be in English.

The English translation of the parts permitted in the vernacular is given in the *Roman Missal* newly edited and published for use in the dioceses of the United States. Two editions of the official altar missal have been authorized by the Bishops’ Commission: Benziger Brothers, and Catholic Book Publishing Co.

IV. Directives Concerning the Use of the Vernacular At Mass

1. In the dioceses of the United States of America it is lawful to use English, to the extent described in the decree of April 2, 1964, at all Masses at which the people are present, beginning on the First Sunday of Advent, November 29, 1964. (The clause “at which the people are present”—in the Constitution “*adstante populo*”—may be interpreted as applying to all scheduled parish or institutional Masses.)

2. The lessons, epistle, and gospel in English should be proclaimed facing the people at both low and sung Masses.

3. At low Masses and at sung Masses without a subdeacon, it is possible and even desirable that the (lesson or lessons before the epistle, if any, and the) epistle should be proclaimed by a

reader, whether clerical or lay, other than the celebrant. The reading of the gospel should be reserved to the deacon or, in his absence, to the celebrant.

4. Although the use of English is permitted to the same extent in low Masses and in sung Masses, the vernacular texts of the Ordinary and Proper must be sung to melodies or settings approved by the competent ecclesiastical authority, i.e. the National Conference of Bishops.

5. It remains lawful to sing the Proper chants *recto tono* or to psalm tones in the absence of appropriate settings.

6. At both high Masses and solemn Masses, the lessons, epistle, and gospel may be recited in a loud, clear, and solemn tone of voice without chant.

7. The English greetings, versicles, etc., may be sung *recto tono* in the absence of appropriate settings.

8. Especially on Sundays and feast days it is desirable, at least at the principal low Masses that psalms or hymns appropriate to the respective parts of Mass should be sung by the people. This is particularly applicable at the entrance of the priest (and during the preparatory prayers which remain in Latin), between the lessons, at the Offertory, during Communion, and as a recessional (that is, immediately after the blessing, during the Latin last gospel and the recession of the celebrant).

9. At low Masses, where possible, it is desirable that the congregation or the choir or other group, or a cantor recite the Proper chants, adding psalm verses as needed.

10. Psalms or psalm verses added to the Proper antiphons of the Roman Missal, whether sung or recited, should follow the text of the Book of Psalms published by the Confraternity of Christian Doctrine, from which the respective antiphons have been adopted.

11. For the present, the form of the common prayer or prayer of the faithful may be determined by the individual Bishops. For example, the invocations of the third part of the Litany of the Saints may be used, or the variants of the Byzantine Litany already employed in some places.

12. Since the Collects, etc., and the Preface of the Canon remain in Latin, it is desirable that the commentator, in addition to his other duties, should very briefly summarize these prayers for the benefit of the faithful.

POSITIONS OF THE FAITHFUL AT HOLY MASS

At sung or *High Masses* it is customary and desirable for the people to follow the same postures as the clergy, as these are listed in the Roman Missal in the new code of rubrics (1960). This we recommend for accepted usage around the country, when Mass is offered as a sung Mass.

With regard to recited or *Low Masses*, which will be the usual manner for the offering of the participated Mass, a very practical problem presents itself. For the Low Mass, the Missal formerly gave only one rule: that those present should kneel throughout, except at the Gospel. This direction, which was made obsolete by various local customs, was suppressed in 1960, so that now it is appropriate to adapt the postures of the sung Mass to congregational use at the Low Mass in participated fashion.

The problem has been somewhat complicated in the practical order by some liturgists, who with every good intention and quite properly stress standing as the posture most expressive of the spirit of public prayer. As the priest stands, it seems proper that the people should stand, when they pray, sing or speak with him. However, this does not take into consideration the very practical problem, which standing poses for the older members of the congregation, and indeed many of its younger members.

Accordingly, then, the following usage is recommended with a view to making it as simple as possible.

POSITIONS OF THE FAITHFUL AT LOW MASS

The Liturgy of the Word

Entrance Rite (up to the Epistle)

STAND

(If no Hymn is sung, kneel during Celebrant's prayers at foot of altar)

The Word of God (up to the Offertory Antiphon)

Epistle	SIT
Gospel	STAND
Homily	SIT
Creed	STAND
(Common Prayer, or Prayer of the Faithful)	STAND

The Liturgy of the Eucharist

Preparation of the Gifts (up to the Preface)

Offertory Prayers	SIT
Prayer over the Gifts (Secret)	STAND

Eucharistic Prayer (CANON)

Preface and Sanctus	STAND
After Sanctus through the great "Amen" concluding the Canon	KNEEL

Eucharistic Banquet (COMMUNION)

The Lord's Prayer	STAND
After Agnus Dei	KNEEL
Postcommunion and dismissal	STAND
Blessing	KNEEL
Recessional	STAND

Reception of Holy Communion

Whether the individual communicant kneels or stands, while receiving Holy Communion, depends on local custom and circumstances. Obviously, the Ordinary can decide for his Diocese.

Additional Kneeling

For Requiem Masses, and on certain penitential weekdays, the rubrics of the Missal prescribe kneeling during the Collect and the Postcommunion.

This rule applies on the weekdays of Advent, Lent, Passiontide, September Ember days, Vigils of II and III class outside Paschal time, and in Masses for the dead.



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