

FROM THE EDITORS

Our English Translations

Solesmes Abbey has just released the long-awaited volume, *Gregorian Missal*. (See the review on p. 24.) This modern *Liber usualis* is the ideal prayerbook for use at Mass sung in Latin with all the chants for both the proper and the ordinary parts provided in square notation. A French edition has been on the market for several years.

In admiring this book and welcoming it as a most useful tool for the congregation and the choir, one's joy is harmed if not lost when the official English translations are examined. The editors provide the chants both with their Latin texts and also the translations of those texts made by the monks of Solesmes, intended only for the benefit of the reader and not for public recitation. However, the texts for those parts belonging to the celebrant, which are not given in Gregorian notation, such as the orations, are printed in a second column alongside the Latin. The official version of the liturgical texts for English-speaking nations (ICEL) is the version provided. One is not only appalled by the banality of that English translation, but what strikes one so forceably is the damage done to the very content of the Latin prayers in what is supposed to pass as a translation.

Deus is translated as Father; relative clauses are made into declarative sentences; *gratia* is never translated as grace. The Latin prayers are (scarcely) recognizable as the same composition in the parallel column. For example, here is the prayer over the gifts for the Second Sunday of Advent:

Placare, Domine, quaesumus, nostrae precibus humilitatis et hostiis, et, ubi nulla suppetunt suffragia meritorum, tuae nobis indulgentiae succurre praesidiis.

Lord, we are nothing without you. As you sustain us with your mercy, receive our prayers and offerings.

Or this oration from the Fifth Sunday in Ordinary Time:

Familiam tuam, quaesumus, Domine, continua pietate custodi, ut, quae in sola spe gratiae caelestis innititur, tua semper protectione muniatur.

Father, watch over your family and keep us safe in your care, for all our hope is in you.

We have been deprived of the beauty of the prayers of the Latin liturgy, and we have at the same time been subjected to a poverty of expression in English which is truly a language of great beauty and power. Rather than transferring the classicism, the strength and the theological wisdom of the Latin texts, the translators have emasculated the Latin orations and having labored have not even produced a mouse.

What all of us knew for nearly two decades but have probably forgotten is now clearly laid out for us in the *Gregorian Missal* with the parallel columns of the Latin and English texts of the Mass.

One need not wonder why the liturgical reforms have been so much less successful than what was hoped for. One need not ask why the great privilege of the use of the vernacular in our worship has not been the great boon it was expected to be. The answer lies openly before us: the banality, even ineptitude of the ICEL translations that we are forced to use and pay for.

While we welcome the Solesmes *Gregorian Missal* as a marvellous tool for worship, we unfortunately welcome it also as an on-going reminder of the defective language that we have been obliged to use in the worship of God in our own tongue. How long, O Lord, how long?

R.J.S.

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