

Catholic bishops change words of the liturgy: Translation closer to Latin text

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At the start of every Roman Catholic mass, the priest welcomes the congregation with the words, “The Lord be with you.” The collective response, “And also with you,” a fixture for decades, will soon be changed to “And with your spirit.”

That was one of dozens of wording changes to the Catholic mass approved June 15 in Los Angeles by the nation’s Catholic bishops during their annual spring conference. The changes are the first to be made in the English-translation liturgy since it was introduced more than 35 years ago.

The changes “will affect the worship life of every Catholic in the United States and beyond,” said Bishop Donald Trautman of Erie, Pennsylvania, head of the bishops’ liturgy committee. “These texts are presenting a new richness that we have not always experienced in the past.”

He said the changes are at least a year away from reaching parishes because formal Vatican approval is needed.

The 173-29 vote on a new English translation for the Catholic mass reflected the Vatican’s request—expressed formally in 2001—for a translation closer to the Latin text formalized in the 16th century. English translations began after church reforms of the 1960s. Before that, Latin was the only language used.

While the bishops like to present themselves as a unified group on most issues, they have been divided on this one.

Many have expressed concern that parishioners would have a harder time understanding the new translation. They’ve also worried over whether Catholics will wonder if they have been praying correctly in using the current translation.

Still, the changes, proposed by the International Commission for English in the Liturgy, are not as dramatic as the ones of the Second Vatican Council. One of the changes called for then was having priests face the congregation rather than the altar when they celebrate mass.

Most changes approved last month involved just a few words. Among them:

- The Act of Penitence, in which Catholics confess that they have sinned, will include the lines, “I have sinned greatly, through my fault, through my fault, through my most grievous fault,” rather than “I have sinned through my own fault.”
- The opening of the Nicene Creed, which states the basic elements of Christian faith, will begin “I believe,” rather than “We believe.”
- Before communion, the prayer “Lord, I am not worthy to receive you” will become “Lord, I am not worthy that you should enter under my roof.”

Bishop Arthur Serratelli of Paterson, New Jersey, who supports the changes, said they are necessary because the English translation now in use focuses too much on “accessibility” rather than on accuracy.

“For so many years, we got used to a translation that wasn’t totally accurate,” said the multilingual Serratelli. American Catholics who have been saying the response by rote for years now may start thinking more about the actual words, he said.

Thomas Reese, author of *A Flock of Shepherds: The National Conference of Catholic Bishops*, said the changes will create more problems than they resolve.

“It’s going to cause chaos in the parishes,” he said. “I feel sorry for the poor parish priests who are going to have to stand up in front of the people and tell them, ‘The translation, what you’ve been saying for the past 30 years, we’re now going to change.’ People are going to scratch their heads.” *-Religion News Service*