

This introduction is from the new book, "Called to Pray: Lent and Easter with the Revised Roman Missal" edited by Gilles Mongeau and Brett Brett Salkeld, Toronto: Novalis, 2012.

ISBN : 9782896464395

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Praying the Liturgy

One of the most important goals of the liturgical renewal that led to the Second Vatican Council was to promote "full, conscious and active participation" of the faithful (both clergy and laity) in the liturgy of the Church.

This goal is often misunderstood, in ordinary conversations, as applying only to the lay faithful. There is a sense that what we need to do is find ways for the laity to say more, do more and sing more at the Eucharist. One hears that if worship was more interesting, or if the homilies were more relevant, or if the music repertoire was different, then people would participate. While it is true that in some circumstances any or all of the above could be reviewed and improved, none of them actually lead, by themselves, to what the Second Vatican Council meant by full conscious and active participation.

Shortly after the Second World War, church leaders in Europe began to reflect on the frightening inability of the Church as a community of faith to resist movements like Nazism; at the same time, bishops, priests and religious in developing countries were beginning to open their eyes to the fact that missionaries had often been blind to the colonialism that had infected the preaching of the Gospel among non-European peoples. This collective reflection led many to identify a lack of deep evangelization among Catholics themselves as a serious problem, and in turn, leaders in the liturgical renewal became aware that the celebration of the Eucharist was not as fruitful in its witness and in its effects as it could be. A key to the problem was that during

the celebration of the Eucharist, three different groups were present in the Church building, but each group did its own thing: the priest celebrated quietly at the altar; the choir sang hymns and responses that overlapped and reproduced some of the actions of the priest; the faithful prayed their own devotions. Thus there were three parallel but disconnected activities rather than one Eucharist.

The goal of the liturgical renewal was to reconnect these three disparate activities into one act of worship, by reorienting and uniting the personal and social dimensions of devotion. Full, conscious and active participation, in this context, means that each group taking part in the liturgy takes conscious ownership of their role. It means to make a conscious and intentional choice to pray the liturgy together, such that my personal devotion is not something apart from the ritual action of the community, but is fostered by and flows through the communal celebration.

Thus, to pray the liturgy, one must take time to become familiar with the words and actions we will be speaking and acting out before I show up on Sunday. It means taking the time to listen to the Scriptures ahead of time, to study the words of the prayers so that they become familiar to me.

In December 2000, Blessed Pope John Paul II announced that the Roman Missal, the book that brings together all the prayers of the mass, would be republished in a third revised edition. This new edition would include all the masses for saints newly created in the last decades of the twentieth century, a few new prefaces for the Eucharistic prayers, and other texts for special masses. This third edition would, of course, be published in Latin, and so the various bishops' conferences began to prepare for the task of translating this third edition into the vernacular. In the following year, the Vatican office responsible for liturgy and the sacraments issued *Liturgiam Authenticam*, a set of new directives for translating texts for the liturgy. Prior to 2001, prayers and other texts for worship were translated using principles of *dynamic equivalence*, or "meaning-for-meaning" translation; this approach to translating has the benefit of producing texts for worship that are very accessible in the vernacular. But this great accessibility has a cost: already in the 1980's many English-speaking bishops were suggesting that the texts used in the mass did not adequately show forth their biblical sources. People were not hearing and praying just how biblical the mass really is. And so the new directives for translation emphasize *formal equivalence*, or "word-

for-word” translation. This approach brings out more clearly the relationship between the prayers at mass and the Scriptures.

But this closer connection with biblical patterns can make the prayers seem more formal and stilted. Full, conscious and active participation will require then, that we take the time to study and pray with these new texts, to become more familiar with them. This book is an attempt to help you develop that spiritual affinity with the collects, or opening prayers of the mass, that can lead to full conscious and active participation; it also proposes a method for *lectio divina* prayer that you can use with all the texts of the liturgy, not just the opening prayer.

A Method for Prayer

1. Find a quiet place and time to pray: early morning at the kitchen table before everyone else is up, or your favourite armchair after everyone has left the house or gone to bed, or your office once you've been able to close the door for a few minutes.
2. Settle in and take the time to acknowledge that God is here with you. Offer yourself to God for this time of prayer in these or similar words: "Father, take all of my knowing and loving, and order it now to your greater service and praise." Repeat this short phrase slowly until you sense you mean it with your heart and desire it in your gut.
3. Read the prayer of the day slowly, letting the words and phrases sink in. Read it through a second, maybe even a third time, so that the words come alive in your memory and imagination.
4. Pause and ask yourself: what words, phrases or images from this prayer move me? Which ones catch my attention?
5. Let your memory and imagination savour these words: do any special memories from your life come up as you let these words live in you? Do any desires arise, or a sense of gratitude to God? Simply stay with these movements.
6. At this point, pick up the gospel of the day and read it in light of these words and phrases, and turn to the short reflection we have provided to orient your own encounter with the prayer and the gospel.
7. As you let these interior movements unfold in your heart and mind, you may find that you want to say something to God, or to Jesus. Take the time to share with them what is on your heart and mind.
8. Close with an Our Father.