Spirituality

News



A man walks across the "Rosary Bridge" in 2017 at the shrine of Cap-de-la-Madeleine in Trois-Rivieres, Quebec. (CNS/Philippe Vaillancourt, Presence)

Philippe Vaillancourt

View Author Profile

Catholic News Service

View Author Profile

Join the Conversation

Send your thoughts to *Letters to the Editor*. Learn more

Quebec City — November 29, 2018
Share on BlueskyShare on FacebookShare on TwitterEmail to a friendPrint

French-speaking Canadians will begin using a new translation of the Our Father Dec. 2.

The passage "lead us not into temptation" — that formerly read "do not subject us to temptation" in French — is changed for "do not let us enter into temptation." The change brings the phrasing closer to its Greek origins and also bears witness to a theological evolution.

"With 'do not subject us to temptation,' we had complaints that it's as if God is the one submitting us to temptation. By saying 'do not let us enter,' we are closer to what Jesus says," explained Bishop Serge Poitras of Timmons, Ontario, a member of the Episcopal Commission of Liturgy and Sacraments, French Sector, of the Canadian Conference of Catholic Bishops.

Several experts believe that the French wording, in use since 1966, was confusing to the faithful.

"Many people didn't understand. It is God who tempts us?" Poitras said.

The bishop represents Canada on the international Francophone Episcopal Commission for Liturgical Translations, the same body that was mandated to respond to the Vatican's request in the early 2000s to rework the French liturgical translation. The work, which saw the adoption of a new official translation of the Bible in 2013, could lead in 2019 to the adoption of a new translation of the Roman Missal.

In Canada, the bishops' conference decided to follow other French-speaking countries, including Benin, France and Switzerland, which already use the new translation without waiting for the new missal.

Fr. Gaetan Baillargeon, former director of the Canadian bishops' National Liturgy Office, agreed that the translation used for more than 50 years had caused dissatisfaction.

"This was the so-called ecumenical translation. But some Francophone Orthodox communities did not even use it, for example," he said, stressing that ecumenical relations had to be considered before endorsing the new translation.

Canadian dioceses where French is in use have been explaining the change in recent weeks. In a message addressed to parishioners in early November, Bishop Andre Gazaille of Nicolet, Quebec, wrote that the new version "better reflects the spirit of the prayer taught by Jesus to his disciples."

Greek Gospels in hand, Alain Gignac, director of the University of Montreal's Institute of Religious Studies, explained that the phrase, found in the Gospels of Matthew and Luke, can be translated literally by "let us not go in the direction of temptation."

He said the Our Father was constructed borrowing from both Gospels.

"Originally, it's an oral tradition that is neither from Luke nor Matthew ... First in Aramaic, then translated into Greek, then into Latin, the Our Father that we pray today draws from these two evangelists," he said. The prayer attributed to Jesus has several differences of one Gospel to another, he added.

Gignac welcomed the new translation while recalling its limits.

Advertisement

"We must give up on retracing the exact Our Father that came out of the mouth of Jesus," he said.

Liturgy, Poitras explained, borrows from Hebrew, Greek and Latin, which remains the official language of the church. In translating the Bible, liturgists consider the original language as well as how it sounds when spoken aloud.

"We are at some distance from the Gospel phrasing. We are indeed in a theological construction," he said.

The modification of the Lord's Prayer is therefore more than a purely linguistic matter; it directly concerns the participation of the faithful during celebrations. In this regard, liturgist Marie-Josee Poire said two of the great objectives of any liturgy remain the active participation of the faithful and its spiritual good.

"Today's liturgy, let's admit it, no longer speaks the language of the majority," Poire said. "So you have to be concerned about liturgical participation in a way that people are not just attendees, but participants."

Poire, who is responsible for a liturgical and sacramental formation program for Canadian dioceses, believes the adoption of the new wording of the Lord's Prayer can be an opportunity to reflect on the status of the prayer for Christians.

"The Our Father builds an image of God. A passage like this ('do not let us enter into temptation') can be an opportunity for reflection for communities or families on its underlying image of God," she said.

"Does the image of a God who wants to tempt his children match what the Gospel proclaims? The (translation) issue may seem trivial, but ... it shapes our image of God. The ritual builds the person. The Our Father builds our faith, and our way of living our faith."

- - -

Vaillancourt is editor-in-chief of Presence info, based in Montreal.