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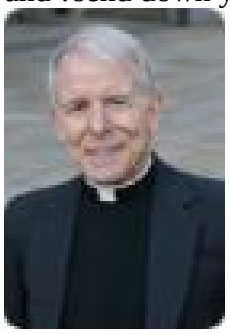
Pastor says it's time to 'let go,' accept new missal as inevitable

Tom Roberts | Mar. 14, 2011

Shown is the title page of the new Roman Missal issued by Pope John Paul II in Latin in 2002. (CNS photo/Nancy Wiechec)

A prominent Seattle pastor who initiated a campaign to delay the use of a new translation of the Catholic liturgy told his congregation recently that the implementation of the new texts was inevitable and that the parish would cooperate in their use despite his personal reservations.

More than a year ago, Fr. Michael G. Ryan, pastor of St. James Cathedral, in an article published in *America* magazine, launched a project he titled ?What If We Just Said Wait?? He was among other critics of the new missal, who have described the attempt at a word-for-word translation from the Latin as clumsy, awkward and alien to spoken English. Ryan cited such phrases as ?consubstantial with the Father?; ?oblation of our service?; and ?send down your Spirit like the dewfall.?



In the *America* article, Ryan placed the translations in a broad context, arguing that they were ?being used as a tool -- some would even say as a weapon -- to advance specific agendas,? including the ?systematic dismantling of the great vision? of the Second Vatican Council.

An outpouring of support for waiting and reconsidering the translations, he wrote, might convince those who ?have decided that Latinity is more important than lucidity? to listen to the people in the pews and reevaluate their position.

To this date nearly 22,000 people have signed on to a petition on the Web site, whatifwejustsaidwait.org [1]. The petition, in part, reads:

> We are convinced that adopting translations that are highly controversial, and which leaders among our bishops as well as many highly respected liturgists and linguists consider to be seriously flawed, will be a grave mistake.
>
> For this reason we earnestly implore the bishops of the English-speaking world to undertake a pilot program by which the new translations -- after a careful program of catechesis -- can be introduced into some carefully selected parishes and communities throughout the English-speaking world for a period of one (liturgical) year, after which they can be objectively evaluated.

In his recent homily, Ryan explained his continuing reservations, saying that he thought the process used to change the translations ?was a step away from the teaching of the Second Vatican Council about the renewal of the liturgy and the collegial role of bishops.?

At the same time, he said, ?Good, intelligent, faith-filled people line up on both sides, and the advocates for the new Missal just happen to have most of the bishops of the English-speaking world on their side.?

Ultimately, he said, ?there comes a point when one?s personal views need to give way to a larger good, a point where trust needs to take over, and I have come to that point.? Ryan said he would both trust in the Lord and trust that ?it is the people who will have the last word on the new Missal once it?s been introduced. In the end, the people?s words will be the most important word of all, certainly more important than any word of mine.?

When the new translation is introduced during Advent, he said, ?we will continue here at St. James to do what we already do so very well: celebrate the church?s liturgy in a way that is profoundly prayerful and profoundly beautiful. If the new Missal helps with that, so much the better; and if it doesn?t, we will do our best to make the best of it.?

In his homily, Ryan said that despite his continuing objections to the process by which the translations were developed and to certain elements of the text itself, that the time had come to ?let go? of those concerns and prepare for what appears an inevitability. He admitted, ?Simple acceptance doesn?t come all that easily to me. On this issue there have been a lot of inner struggles and some sleepless nights.?

The Web site, established and maintained by others, will continue to record signatures of those who want the issue of the translations revisited.

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Links:
[1] http://whatifwejustsaidwait.org