

Missing the missal's poetry? Here's a replacement

Sharon Abercrombie | Nov. 28, 2011 Eco Catholic

Over Thanksgiving weekend, concern about the revised Roman Missal was causing major angst among a number of Catholics as they experienced the language changes for the first time in the Advent liturgy.

Advance comments this week from friends posed the question: "How can we possibly pray using these clumsy words, these endless phrases?"

Here is an idea: First, take a deep breath. Next, search through your bookshelves for anecdotes of beauty. The poetry and depth of other prayer styles are waiting to feed your hungry souls.

One of my favorite collections is "[Earth Prayers from Around the World](#)," [1] edited by Elizabeth Roberts and Elias Amidon. "Earth Prayers" has been available since 1991, but its contents are timeless. Contributors include Pablo Neruda, Black Elk, Thich Nhat Hanh, T. S. Eliot, Brother Antoninus, St. Francis, Rainer Maria Rilke and Albert Schweitzer.

The authors' introduction to the section "Praise and Thanksgiving" is particularly timely:

"At the heart of Earth Prayers is a sense of belonging. Belonging is the basic truth of our existence. We belong here. Life belongs here. Likewise, at the heart of gratefulness, in its deepest sense, we also find an expression of belonging. When we say 'thank you,' we really are saying, 'we belong together.'"

They continue:

"That is why we sometimes find it so difficult to say 'thank you,' because we don't want to acknowledge our interdependence. We don't want to be obliged. But in a healthy society that is exactly what we seek: mutual obligations. Everyone is obliged to everyone and everything else, we all belong together. We are of each other.

"In this awareness we are freed from self preoccupation -- and only then, emptied of self, can we be filled with thanks. As Brother David Steindl-Rast tells us, 'Love whole heartedly, be surprised, give thanks and prayer -- then you will discover the fullness of your life.'"

Amidon and Roberts write: "Within this human impulse to gratitude flow the vast cycles of universal reciprocity ? for everything that is taken, something has to be given in return. If you merely take in a breath and stop there, you will die. Likewise if you merely breathe out, Life is not giving or taking, but give and take. This is the dynamic expression of universal belonging expressed in our thanksgiving. "

The authors offer a poem by Dolores La Chapelle:

We give-away our thanks to the earth

Which gives us our home.
We give away our thanks to the rivers and lakes
Which give away their water.
We give-away our thanks to the trees
Which give-away fruit and nuts.
All beings on earth, the trees, the animals, the wind

and the rivers give-away to one another
So all is in balance.

Amidon and Roberts remind us that "perhaps the greatest gift we humans have to offer the rest of creation is our heartfelt appreciation. The ability to receive in thankfulness the blessings of life is an awesome quality ... our praise and thanksgiving is as essential a part of life's give and take as are the cycles of oxygen and water or any other nourishment flowing through the biosphere. For millennia prayers and songs have been offered up to celebrate the miracle of existence of which we are part. May (these prayers and songs) join our own."

A liturgy of the heart, buoyed by poetry, can be offered in thanksgiving and in praise, any time, any place, outside of church walls. Eucharist comes in many forms.

One of my favorite poems in "Earth Prayers" is by Ernesto Cardenal:

Bless the Lord O my soul
Lord my God you are great
You are clothed with the energy of atoms
As with a mantle
From a cloud of whirling cosmic dust
As on the potter's wheel
You began to tease out the whorls of the galaxies
And the gas escapes from your fingers condensing and burning
And you were fashioning the stars
You made a spatterdash of planets like spores or seeds
And scattered comets like flowers.

Cardenal's words present us with a *lectio divina* opportunity around the creation story at its finest.

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Links:

[1] <http://www.amazon.com/Earth-Prayers-around-World-Invocations/dp/006250746X>