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New missal could drive away Catholics at California parish

by Monica Clark

NCR Today

On the first Sunday of Advent, Michael Cassidy sat in a pew at St. Mary Magdalen Parish in Berkeley, Calif., as he has done most Sundays for the past 35 years. But it is likely to be his last liturgy there for a while.

Because of his strong opposition to the new Roman missal, he is taking "a vacation from the Roman rite," a decision he describes as "very painful."

Cassidy's concerns go beyond the new translation to the motivations underneath the words.

"I believe the whole thing is designed to undercut the ecclesiology of Vatican II, which in turn underlies the prior liturgical changes which followed the council," he said. "The next generation -- assuming that they come to church -- will grow up with a liturgy which denigrates that ecclesiology and glorifies another, older one. So much for 'letting in fresh air.'"

In another pew, fellow parishioner Mary Bucher was offended at the insertion of "I have sinned greatly" into the Introductory Rite.

"I don't go around sinning greatly," she said. "I am not going to say this."

Why the return to such a negative view of faith? she asked. "Are they trying to undo Vatican II?"

Well, she said, "We're not going back."

Bucher, who instructs parents preparing for the baptism of their children, worries that praying such negative words will lead young Catholics to develop "a negative take on life" and miss the marvels and power of faith.

Additionally, she said, "This translation is very retro and a waste of time and money."

Cassidy has spent a great deal of the past year trying to get his parish and the Oakland Diocese to address what he believes is the negative pastoral effect of the liturgical changes.

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In a letter to Oakland's Bishop Salvatore Cordileone, he wrote, "This is a serious matter because it affects the prayer life of the people."

He reminded the bishop that Anglicans who become Catholics can keep their liturgy and those who want to worship in Latin can do so, but "ordinary Catholics who have embraced the work of the Spirit in Vatican II are to suffer."

Also to suffer, he said, are the ecumenical strides taken in the last 40 years.

"The process employed by the Curia completely disrespected our ecumenical partners, particularly those Protestant and Anglican bodies which had generously adopted common texts for use in their own liturgies so that more of us could easily pray together," he said.

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