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New missal not the end-all, be-all in Denver

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NCR Today

I went to Mass on Nov. 28 at a parish in suburban Denver, which by local standards would be considered a fairly meat-and-potatoes place -- neither liberal nor conservative, basically nonaligned when it comes to most matters of church politics.

There, the introduction of the new missal on Sunday amounted to a non-event. People followed along and said their parts, without any ferment. There was some chuckling over stumbles at unfamiliar parts, but in general, there was neither overt resistance nor palpable enthusiasm -- simply people trying to adjust.

Chatting briefly with Mass-goers afterwards, I heard several versions of what I would label the "common sense" perspective on liturgical matters. In different ways, most people -- whatever they thought of the new language -- said that the things that really matter in shaping the quality of their liturgical experience boil down to three points: How good the preaching is, how good the music is and how welcoming the community seems.

If those three things are in place, they said, the most defective translation in the world won't prevent them from coming back. Conversely, if those three things are off, even the Platonic ideal of a translation won't get them in the door.

The consensus seemed to be that at the grassroots, most Catholics wish the church would devote even a fraction of the time and energy it's poured into debates over translation to the things that really strike ordinary people as decisive: preaching, music, and community spirit.

Perhaps the problem, as one mother of three told me, is that those things can't be shaped from behind a desk or in a committee room, while translations can. Her message to church leaders? "If you think this is what matters, you need to get out more often."

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