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Maryland churchgoers say they'll 'get used to' new translation

by Maureen Fiedler

NCR Today

I just left the 10:30 a.m. Sunday Mass at St. Mark's Church in Hyattsville, Md. This is a wonderfully diverse congregation that reflects my neighborhood: African-American, white, Latino, Indian and south Asian. In fact, this parish offers two Masses in Spanish each weekend. There were about 200 in attendance at this Mass.

Before I entered, one parishioner, Geneva, told me that the Mass changes had been announced the previous Sunday, but no one "practiced" them. "They are not large changes," she said. "They won't make much difference."

At the beginning of Mass, a lay leader announced the changes again and referred everyone to a "prayer card" in the seats. She knew that the changes would be confusing for many. "We may be speaking in tongues for a couple of weeks," she said, "and that's OK."

"Speak in tongues" they did. Old and new responses were often blended. Just before Communion, the prayer was totally garbled.

In his homily, the deacon announced that he was "excited" about the changes. The reason? They would force people away from ingrained habits and make them think about what they are saying.

I asked about 10-12 parishioners as they were leaving church what they thought. Here's a representative sample of the responses:

- Suzanne: "It's too new; I'm not used to it. But it's fine with me."
- Nora: "My mom changed with Vatican II, and I want to follow her example of accepting change. I'll get used to it."
- Emanuel and Anna: "Not sure why they did it, but it's not bad. We'll get used to it."
- Dave (with a sigh): "I guess I'll get used to it with time."
- Kayla: "No opinion here. It's going to be confusing."

This is frankly what I expected. The average parishioner at St. Mark's is not involved in -- or probably even aware of -- the translation controversy. Even when I cited the change in the Creed from "one in being" to "consubstantial," no one had an opinion one way or the other.

The new changes don't look large to St. Mark's parishioners. From their point of view, all that's needed is a little more practice.

Just one thing was unusual this Sunday morning. The ushers taking up the collection totally missed my section! Now ... that's *really* new!

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