



Explaining the history of the *Roman Missal*

The *Roman Missal* is the book of prescribed prayers, chants, and instructions for the celebration of Mass in the Roman Catholic Church. Published first in Latin under the title *Missale Romanum*, the text was eventually translated and published in modern languages for use in local churches throughout the world. In 2002, Pope John Paul II introduced a new edition of the *Missale Romanum* - the *editio typica tertia*, or “third typical edition” - for use in the Church. Soon after, the complex work of translating the Latin text into the vernacular began. As the Church throughout the world prepares to implement the *Roman Missal, third edition*, it is worth remembering that this process is not at all new. In fact, revisions to the *Roman Missal* have occurred numerous times throughout the Church’s history as the Liturgy developed and was adapted to meet current needs.

In the earliest centuries of the Church, there were no books containing prescribed liturgical prayers, texts, or other instructions. Because the faith of the Church was (and still is) articulated in liturgical prayer, there was a need for consistency and authenticity in the words used in the celebration of the Liturgy. Collections of prayers developed gradually for various situations such as for a particular monastery, for the Pope, or for local churches. Such collections were contained in *libelli* (“booklets”), which over centuries were drawn together into larger collections of prayers.

These *libelli* were eventually assembled into *liber sacramentorum* (“sacramentaries”), which contained some of the prayers used during Mass. The earliest of these sacramentaries were attributed to Pope Leo I, “Leo the Great” (440-461), and Pope Gelasius (492-496), though surviving versions date from centuries earlier. Other early manuscripts, such as the *Ordines Romani*, contained detailed descriptions of the celebration of the Mass with the Pope in Rome. Those written accounts also served as instructions, or rubrics, for the celebration of Mass in other settings. Liturgical books grew over time as they passed from one local community to another, often with prayers added in margins or in blank spaces. The process of sharing these texts was to copy each sacramentary by hand. This was a laborious task which at times led to inconsistencies and errors.

The first true liturgical books, called “missals,” were found in monasteries beginning around the 12th and 13th centuries. In addition to all of the prayers, a missal also contained the biblical readings, the chants, and the rubrics for the celebration of Mass. It is difficult to trace the exact

origins of the missal. The first book bearing the name *Missale Romanum* appeared in 1474, perhaps not coincidentally around the same time as the invention of the printing press by Johannes Gutenberg in 1440. But it was not until after the Council of Trent that Pope Pius V, in 1570, promulgated an edition of the *Missale Romanum* that was to be used throughout the Latin Church. This marked the first official attempt at uniformity in the celebration of the Mass.

Since that time, new editions of the *Roman Missal* were promulgated by various Popes to accommodate the ongoing evolution and development of the Liturgy:

- 1604 – Pope Clement VIII
- 1634 – Pope Urban VIII
- 1884 – Pope Leo XIII
- 1920 – Pope Benedict XV
- 1962 – Pope John XXIII
- 1970 – Pope Paul VI
- 1975 – Pope Paul VI
- 2002 – Pope John Paul II

In addition, there have been a number of other revisions to the text which incorporated minor changes. The most recent of these occurred in 1957, after Pope Pius XII's revisions to the rites of Holy Week and the Sacred Triduum in 1955, and in 2008, when Pope Benedict XVI incorporated a number of additional prayers, including those for recently canonized saints as well as for the celebration of an extended Vigil for Pentecost.

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