

# *Bending slightly: The Prayers of Advent Sundays II, III and IV* by Xavier Rindfleisch

The title of this essay is a reference to one of the many gratuitous changes made to the 2008 text approved by the conferences of bishops by the unknown revisers who produced the 2010 Received Text. In each of the formulae of consecration in the Eucharistic Prayers, a rubric for the priest directs *parum se inclināt*, translated in 1974, 1998, and 2008 as, “he bows slightly.” 2010 renders this, “he bends slightly,” a change which, when pointed out to clergy at Missal Translation Study Days, has led to merriment among the gathered brethren.

Adoption and adaptation of that rubric for our title signals that, for the most part, the three priestly orations of these Sundays are not quite as bad as the texts examined so far, though they evidence, in their own way, the problems that plague the entire project (see [A Tale of Two Prefaces: I and II Advent](#)).

## SECOND SUNDAY OF ADVENT

Omnípotens et miséricors Deus,  
in tui occúrsum Fílii festinántes nulla ópera terréni actus impédiat,  
sed sapiéntiae caeléstis erudítio  
nos fáciat eius esse consórtes.  
Qui tecum.

| 2008   | 2010   |
|--|--|
| Almighty and merciful God,<br>let no earthly endeavor hinder those<br>who hasten to meet your Son,<br>but let our learning of heavenly wisdom<br>make us his companions.<br>Who lives and reigns with you. | Almighty and merciful God,<br>may no earthly undertaking hinder those<br>who set out in haste to meet your Son,<br>but may our learning of heavenly wisdom<br>gain us admittance to his company.<br>Who lives and reigns with you. |

1) We begin with a gratuitous change: why does the “let” of 2008 become “may” in 2010? There is no issue of Latin translation here, no English grammatical or syntactical reason for such a change, no stylistic consideration either. In fact, one could argue that both versions would have been improved by introducing what in English usage is a “pleasing variation”: “let” in line 2 and “may” in line 4. It may be that, for purposes of sonority, the 2008 translators did not want to have a “may” in line 4 be too near a “make” in line 5.

2) *Festinantes* is, precisely, “hastening = who hasten” as in 2008, not “set out in haste” as 2010. Small point? Maybe. But *Liturgiam authenticam* urges exact

translation wherever possible. The Latin prayer, in fact, speaks of those who are **already hastening**, not just **setting out** (there are other Latin words for that!). The change introduced in the 2010 version has the added effect, as do so many of its changes, of destroying the pleasing rhythm of the 2008 version.

3) Both versions render *opera* in the singular. Though the literal translation is, obviously, “works,” surely “endeavor” is a far more pleasing word, both aurally and in its breadth of meaning, than “undertaking” – not to mention echoes of the mortician’s craft!

4) *Nos faciat eius esse consortes* is, again very precisely, “make us (to be) his companions.” It precisely is *not* “gain us admittance to his company.” (See the Roman Canon’s prayer *Nobis quoque peccatoribus: intra quorum nos consortium . . . largitor admitte*). Who made the decision, here, for the translation of so simple a Latin sentence to be rendered by such an obvious paraphrase, if you could even call it a paraphrase? Perhaps the answer is to be found in the *Nobis quoque peccatoribus*, i.e., perhaps the same person changed this Collect who changed 2008’s straightforward and precise translation “To us also, your sinful servants” into the unspeakable (in more ways than one!) “Festival of Commas”: “To us, also, your servants, who, though sinners.” Entirely gratuitous and utterly clumsy.

Placáre, Dómine, quaesumus, nostrae précibus humilitátis et hóstiis,  
 et, ubi nulla súppetunt suffrágia meritórum,  
 tuae nobis indulgéntiae succúrre praesídiis.  
 Per Christum.

| 2008   | 2010   |
|--|--|
| Be pleased with our poor prayers and offerings,<br>O Lord, we pray,<br>and since we have no merits to plead our cause,<br>come to our rescue<br>with the protection of your mercy.<br>Through Christ our Lord. | Be pleased, O Lord, with our humble<br>prayers and offerings,<br>and since we have no merits to plead our cause,<br>come, we pray, to our rescue<br>with the protection of your mercy.<br>Through Christ our Lord. |

Some will welcome “humble” as a more literal translation of *humilitatis*. But why, oh why, must 2010 be for ever splitting up the Latin construction *Domine, quaesumus* or *quaesumus, Domine* unto no purpose? The Latin prayer simply does **not** say what 2010 makes it say: it *is*, *Placáre, Dómine, quaesumus* and *succúrre*. It is **not** *Placáre, Dómine* and *succúrre, quaesumus*. We thought the whole point of this new translation was to translate what the Latin set forth. We’ve already been using the paraphrase and rewrites for forty years.

Repléti cibo spiritális alimóniae,  
 súplices te, Dómine, deprecámur,  
 ut, huius participatióne mystérii,  
 dóceas nos terréna sapiénter perpéndere,  
 et caeléstibus inhaerére.  
 Per Christum.

| 2008   | 2010  |
|--|---|
| Replenished with the food of spiritual nourishment,<br>we humbly beseech you, O Lord,<br>that, through our partaking in this mystery,<br>you will teach us to judge wisely the things of earth<br>and hold fast to the things of heaven.<br>Through Christ our Lord. | Replenished by the food of spiritual nourishment,<br>we humbly beseech you, O Lord,<br>that, through our partaking in this mystery,<br>you may teach us to judge wisely the things of earth<br>and hold firm to the things of heaven.<br>Through Christ our Lord. |

- 1) Gratuitous: “with” to “by”? Any improvement?
- 2) The 2010 revisers probably thought that by changing the verb in line 4 from 2008’s “will” to “may” they were championing proper use of the subjunctive. Only if you’re working from a textbook on English. The intense pleading, “we humbly beseech you” only emphasizes the earnestness of a prayer that firmly believes God **will** do this thing for us, so that “will” here is precisely what the English version wants and needs to have.”May,” though technically a subjunctive, communicates a tentativeness unwarranted by the preceding text, and making its use erroneous, or at least imprecise, here: that’s just the way English works!
- 3) 2008 used “hold fast” because “‘firm’ was changed to ‘fast.’ This and other changes were made by the Commission (ICEL), January, 2009, “in light of comments on the Gray Book (2008) received from the Congregation and from the Conferences, and for the sake of consistency” (note under Tuesday of the First Week of Advent in the final version of the 2008 text). The Commission giveth and *Vox Clara* taketh away? And some authorities would argue that, though the verb is “hold firm,” the English ear wants to hear an adverb, “firmly.” 2008 avoids such an issue with the perfectly fine construction “hold fast.”

A reminder: the Advent Sunday Prayers over the Offerings and Prayers after Communion are especially important because they are repeated twice during the week until December 17.

### THIRD SUNDAY OF ADVENT

Deus, qui cónspicis pópulum tuum  
 nativitátis domínicae festivitátem fidéliter exspectáre,  
 praesta, quaesumus, ut valeámus ad tantae salútis gáudia perveníre,  
 et ea votis sollémnibus álacri semper laetítia celebráre.  
 Per Dóminum.

| 2008   | 2010   |
|--|--|
| O God, who look upon your people<br>as they faithfully await the feast day of the Lord’s birth,<br>strengthen us, we pray,<br>to reach the joys of so great a salvation,<br>and to celebrate them always<br>with solemn worship and glad rejoicing.<br>Through our Lord. | O God, who see how your people<br>faithfully await the feast of the Lord’s Nativity,<br>enable us, we pray,<br>to attain the joys of so great a salvation,<br>and to celebrate them always<br>with solemn worship and glad rejoicing.<br>Through our Lord. |

- 1) *conspicere* is “to look upon” or “to watch” or even “to gaze upon,” i.e., much more intense than *videre* – to see. So if you decide, for some reason contrary to LA, *not* to translate the Latin, to turn *conspicere* into *videre*, than at least use a proper English construction: “who see *that* your people” not “see **how** your people.” What could that mean? Perhaps we’re making Advent wreaths or preparing Christmas baskets? This “trick construction” is something the revisers should have encountered during their SAT preparation, not in a submission to CDW!
- 2) Presumably 2008 used “birth” rather than “Nativity” because of the length of line 2. Line 2 was lengthy in 2008 because of a note attached to the translation of “feast day”: “‘Feast’ was changed to ‘feast day’ as a translation of *festivitatis*. Cf. The Proper of Saints, where *festivitas* is consistently translated as ‘feast day;’ *festum* is translated as ‘Feast’ throughout the Missal and ‘Feast’ is uppercased, cf. *Ratio translationis*, p. 117. (See note 3 above).
- 3) Both versions paraphrase *praesta, quaesumus, ut valeamus*, but surely “strengthen” is preferable to the “enable” of modern pop-psychology and dangerously close to the “empower” jargon, not to mention the “semi-Pelagianism” posited of the 1974 ICEL texts.
- 4) *pervenire* is, precisely, “to reach.” There’s another Latin word for “to attain,” and see the previous note about the 1974 ICEL.

Devoti6nis nostrae tibi, D6mine, quaesumus,  
 h6stia iúgiter immolétur,  
 quae et sacri pérugat institúta mystérii  
 et salutáre tuum nobis poténter operétur.  
 Per Christum.

| 2008   | 2010   |
|--|--|
| Let the sacrifice of our worship, Lord, we pray,<br>be unceasingly offered to you,<br>to complete what was begun in sacred mystery<br>and powerfully accomplish for us your saving work.<br>Through Christ our Lord. | May the sacrifice of our worship, Lord, we pray,<br>be offered to you unceasingly,<br>to complete what was begun in sacred mystery<br>and powerfully accomplish for us your saving work.<br>Through Christ our Lord. |

- 1) “May” is used so frequently in the English translations of the *ut* clauses that are the staple of the Latin orations, that surely the 2008 translators thought that beginning the prayer with “Let” would be stylistically more pleasing; and it is.
- 2) The Latin’s parallel *iúgiter immolétur / poténter operétur* is replicated in 2008’s “unceasingly offered / powerfully accomplish.” Ever tone-deaf to such subtleties, 2010 gratuitously changes the word order of line 2 and leaves line 4 alone. *Mysterium fidei!*

Tuam, D6mine, cleméntiam implorámus,  
 ut haec divína subsidia,  
 a vítiis expiátos,  
 ad festa ventúra nos praeparent.  
 Per Christum.

| 2008  | 2010   |
|---|--|
| We implore your mercy, Lord,<br>that these divine provisions,<br>which have cleansed us of vices,<br>may prepare us for the coming feast.<br>Through Christ our Lord. | We implore your mercy, Lord,<br>that this divine sustenance,<br>may cleanse us of our faults,<br>and prepare us for the coming feasts.<br>Through Christ our Lord. |

- 1) There’s something of a tie ballgame here: *haec divina subsidia* is plural, as in 2008’s “these divine provisions” and not 2010’s “this divine sustenance.” But *festa ventura* is “the coming feasts” as in 2010 and not “the coming feast,” although one authority argues that the plural here means, in fact, “the coming festivities that take place on and around the liturgical feast of Christmas.”
- 2) Then there’s the matter of tenses, which 2008, faithful again to LA, accurately translates and 2010 simply does not. In the Latin original, the divine provisions, **having cleansed** us of vices, **may then prepare us**, and all of this 2008 sets

forth. In 2010, the subordinate clause simply disappears and becomes equal with the primary petition of the prayer, an inaccuracy which was constantly and vehemently criticized 1974 ICEL and which LA specifically directs be corrected in future translations. This problem occurs also at the beginning of the Order of Mass in the absolution prayer that follows the Act of Penitence. 2008 translated the *Misereatur* accurately: “May almighty God have mercy on us, and lead us with our sins forgiven to eternal life.” 2010 returned, inexplicably, to the 1974 ICEL: “May almighty God have mercy on us, forgive us our sins, and bring us to everlasting life.” The recurring inconsistency in applying the norms of LA is mystifying.

3) Finally, the inaccurate translation of *vitia* as “culpa,” and adding the “our” which is not in the original Latin changes the prayer theologically. In traditional Catholic theology, reaffirmed in the contemporary Catechism of the Catholic Church, unlike “faults” or “our faults,” “vices” are habits acquired and hardened by repeated sin; thus, obviously, and as universally well-known, the opposite of “virtues.” The “divine provisions,” therefore, are God’s means of accomplishing something much greater and far deeper than “cleansing our (personal) faults”: they are rooting out habitual evil. If “consubstantial” is important enough to be restored to the Creed and designated as a subject for pastoral catechesis, surely the Catholic concepts of “vices and virtues” are also, and the accurate translation of such words protected by LA’s directive that theological terms not be watered down by paraphrase.

#### FOURTH SUNDAY OF ADVENT

Grátiam tuam, quaesumus, Dómine,  
 méntibus nostris infúnde,  
 ut qui, Angelo nuntiánte, Christi Fílii tui incarnatiónem cognóvimus,  
 per passiónem eius et crucem  
 ad resurrectiÓnis glóriam perducámur.  
 Per Dóminum.

| 2008   | 2010   |
|--|--|
| Pour forth, we beseech you, O Lord,<br>your grace into our hearts,<br>that we, to whom the Incarnation of Christ your Son<br>was made known by the message of an Angel,<br>may by his Passion and Cross<br>be brought to the glory of the resurrection.<br>Through our Lord. | Pour forth, we beseech you, O Lord,<br>your grace into our hearts,<br>that we, to whom the Incarnation of Christ your Son<br>was made known by the message of an Angel,<br>may by his Passion and Cross<br>be brought to the glory of his resurrection.<br>Through our Lord. |

Our criticism here will appear to be nitpicking, but . . . check the vast majority of translations of this famous “Angelus Collect” and you will find the 2010 version, “his resurrection,” has *eius*, which modifies *Passionem* and *Crucem*, being taken as modifying also *resurrectionis*. But a strict application of the rule would have *eius* modifying the accusative *gloriam* (as it does the accusatives *passionem* and *crucem*) rather than the genitive *resurrectionis*. Consult far older translations and you find the literal 2008 version preferred: *his* Passion and Cross bring us to the glory of *the* resurrection, i.e., the resurrection of the body or *our* resurrection, which is a share in but not identical to **his** resurrection. For consistency of capitalization, wouldn’t the modification of all three elements of the Paschal Mystery by “his” then require “his Resurrection” be capitalized, as were “his Passion and Cross”?

Altári tuo, Dómine, superpósita múnera Spíritus ille sanctíficet,  
 qui beátae Maríaе víscera sua virtúte replévit.  
 Per Christum.

| 2008   | 2010   |
|--|--|
| O Lord, may that Spirit who filled the womb of blessed Mary with his power sanctify the gifts laid upon your altar. Through Christ our Lord. | May the same Holy Spirit, O Lord, sanctify these gifts laid upon your altar just as he filled with his power the womb of the blessed Virgin Mary. Through Christ our Lord. |

The 2010 prayer is a different prayer altogether from the 2008 version, and thus a prayer very different from the Latin original. The Latin prayer and its 2008 translation ask that *the same Spirit* who filled the womb of blessed Mary be *the same Spirit* who sanctifies the gifts; and *not*, as in 2010, that the Spirit will sanctify the gifts *in the same way* as he did the womb of Mary. There are also additions in 2010 of words not found in the Latin original: “Holy” before Spirit and “Virgin” Mary

Sumpto pignore redemptionis aeternae, quaesumus, omnipotens Deus,  
 ut quanto magis dies salutiferae festivitatis accedit,  
 tanto devotius proficiamus ad Filii tui digne nativitatis mysterium celebrandum.  
 Qui vivit et regnat in saecula saeculorum.

| 2008  | 2010   |
|---|--|
| Having received the pledge of eternal redemption, we pray, almighty God, that the nearer the feast day of salvation comes the more eager our progress may be towards celebrating worthily the mystery of the birth of your Son. Who lives and reigns for ever and ever. | Having received this pledge of eternal redemption, we pray, almighty God, that as the feast day of our salvation draws ever nearer so we may press forward all the more eagerly to the worthy celebration of the mystery of your Son’s Nativity. Who lives and reigns for ever and ever. |

- 1) There is no “this” in the Latin original (or 2008) before “pledge of eternal redemption,” and the Latin is not shy about using “this” when the prayer means “this.” But it is not used here because it is the Eucharist in general that is the “pledge of eternal redemption,” and not only the Holy Communion received at this Mass. Small point? Yes, but LA addresses a multitude of small points, the observance of which produces an accurate translation of the Roman Missal! Just translate the Latin, please!
- 2) For the same reason, 2010 errs in adding “our” before “salvation,” whereas the Latin original and, as one would expect, and its accurate rendering in 2008 do not add this. The salvation celebrated at Christmas is “good news of great joy that will be **for all the people**, not just **our** salvation. Just translate the Latin!
- 3) With their customary tone-deafness to parallels Latin or English, the revisers have lost the Latin’s lovely *quanto magis / tanto devotius*,” replicated in 2008 by a beautiful parallel that even goes beyond the Latin with its multiple parallels rendered in pleasing rhythm: modifier / subject / verb : “the nearer / the feast day of salvation / comes” and “the more eager / our progress / may be.” All gone in 2010, replaced by an unrhythmic and stumbling series of rambling clunkers: “as the feast day of our salvation draws ever nearer (no comma!) so we may press forward all the more eagerly.” Ugh.
- 4) “towards celebrating worthily” is precisely what the Latin says. The parish may or may not have a “worthy celebration” of Midnight Mass or Christmas Day, but by changing the verb (in its gerundive form) into a noun, the intensity of the prayer is muted, by removing the subjects of this celebration, we, from the activity the Latin prayer (and 2008) is talking about.
- 5) While the “Nativity” of 2010 is a more literal translation of the Latin, and one of those “sacral” words hallowed by long tradition in English usage, the translators of 2008 presumably wanted “who lives and reigns” to follow immediately the Person living and reigning: “the birth of your Son (.) Who lives and reigns.” One can see the problem in 2010: “your Son’s Nativity (.) Who lives and reigns.”

Though better than the texts we’ve looked at thus far – admittedly a bar not set too high – even these 2010 texts prompt recurring questions. “Who?” is fascinating in its own right, of course. Look for effusive statements of undying gratitude for expert work painstakingly carried out, then the customary quiet promotions (*promoveatur ut amoveatur*). More to the point, though is: Why? What was so wrong with 2008 that it had to be “revised” so extensively? Why fill a Missal that the conferences of bishops had already approved with a famous “10,000 changes,” even if most of them are only “slightly bent”?