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Archdiocesan workshop, Archdiocese of New York
June 22, Immaculate Heart of Mary, Scarsdale
Part I

Well, good afternoon, everyone. I suppose I should begin by saying not “can you hear me?” but “can you understand me?” (*laughter*) We’re near enough to Pentecost for that phenomenon of everyone hearing in their own language perhaps to have a particular significance for us this afternoon.

I’m delighted to have this opportunity to spend time with you, particularly because, as Father was just saying, I find myself very much at home among musicians – and I tend to say that that’s what I did when I earned an honest living – but beyond that, in particular, in relation to the sort of things we’re considering this afternoon, I think it’s probably true to say that musicians were among the first people in the church to realize the full significance of the change that would come about as a consequence of having a new translation of the Missal. So I think that wherever you cite yourself on the spectrum or in the process, I think it’s true to say that musicians understand, perhaps at the present time, rather more than almost any other group in the Church, something about what’s about to happen to us.

Now I’m eager that we should make the most of our perhaps relatively limited time this afternoon and get as much out of it as we can. I suppose there are two general ways of doing this. You can have, on an occasion like this, somebody give a sort-of-big state-of-the-nation-type address, and I’ve done a certain amount of that, and I think you have among the material that’s been made available to you, copies of two such formal addresses that I’ve given relatively recently. One was an [address I gave to the Southwestern Liturgical Symposium](#), last summer in Atlanta, towards the future, and the other was [an address I gave last week in Pittsburgh](#), to the Church Music Association of America. So those are set pieces; they’re constructed, shall we say, rather more in sonata form than as an improvisation, but you will find perhaps all of the main ideas expressed more formally in those two pieces. If you get bored with what we’re doing this afternoon you can sit and read them; otherwise, you can take them away with you and perhaps digest them subsequently.

What I thought we would do, is in the two little sessions that I have with you, firstly, we would explore together some very basic concepts to do with the new translation. So I would speak a little bit about the general character of the new translation of the missal, and I say that we’re thinking about this together and I’m not just sort of putting that

together as something that sounds good, because I'm inviting you to interrupt me. Because I'm very aware that when we come to think about this subject, that everybody – or perhaps most people – will be sitting there, already with some sort of question, or some sort of point of view, that they want to bring and share with the rest of us. Well, I think it's better for us to all benefit from that, really, rather than you sitting there waiting for me to either address the point that you were holding in your mind, or the question that you've brought with you. So, I'm issuing a general invitation now for you to interrupt me. You have to do it visually, by raising your hand or drawing my attention in some way, so that we can actually think through this together. It's not a formal address, so it's a flow of consciousness, so it should lend itself to that sort of format a little more.

So in the first part, we're going to think about the general characteristics of the new translation. Then I thought in the second time that we share together, we would focus our thoughts rather more obviously on the musical task, what you as musicians in your parishes and communities would be doing, what you might need to do, and, perhaps to identify between us some principles that will guide us through this next season of our liturgical life together, and some sharing of good practice that may have already emerged in your preparation for these changes. I think that in what follows after those two sessions, we are actually going to get down to some music-making and we will be singing some of the chants from the Missal and seeing a session of working on those chants with a group of young people.

You will be aware, I hope – and your presence here, I suppose, betokens that fact already – that the first Sunday of Advent, the 27th of November this year, sees the implementation throughout the English-speaking world of a new translation of the Roman Missal. In some places, that implementation is already partially underway. Australia, New Zealand, South Africa, are already using the Order of Mass, all prayers of the Order of Mass, parts of the Mass that don't change, day by day or week by week, are already in use in those three territories. In addition to that, in the United Kingdom, the use of sung settings of the Order of Mass has been a possibility since Easter Sunday this year. So the news, which I think is great news, in the United States that that will be a possibility from the beginning of September, is your engagement with that process. It means that when you get to November the 27th, it's not all going to be entirely new. You will already have had some sort of exposure to all of this.

Inevitably, when we're thinking about the translation, the question that I think formulates itself in people's minds – although most people are either too polite to ask, or feel that perhaps it might already have been covered and they don't want to look dumb by asking it – is, "Why?" (*laughter*) It's a very good question! I think it's an entirely reasonable question: why are we doing this? After forty years of using a translation that's become very familiar to us, that has accompanied us in our lives in the

Church, which has inevitably been a source of sanctification, encouragement, and joy to us in lots of ways.

Well, in order to unpack that question a little bit, we have to wind the tape back to the time when this current translation, the one that we now have, was implemented, which was 1973. You'll recall that during the Second Vatican Council, the idea emerged, and certainly is more than hinted at in the *Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy*, the first document that the Fathers of the Council issued, *Sacrosanctum concilium*, that there would be some development, some renewal, of our liturgy. That work, then, began in earnest after the sessions of the Council had ended, and was entrusted to a group of, for the most part, scholars and pastors, who, on behalf of the larger community, which is the Church, undertook the revision and renewal of all of our liturgical books. That group is known, at least in shorthand, as "the Consilium." Consilium for the Implementation of the Constitution on the Liturgy. As the result of that, a new missal in Latin was published in 1969. And then, translations of that missal into various vernacular languages followed in due course. Of course, most people had become used to worshipping, to a greater or lesser extent, in their own language, throughout the years that preceded that point, perhaps in some cases from the early 1960s onwards, and in most places by 1967, so that in the late sixties, the Mass was, for the most part, in English. It rather depends on where you were, on the type of parish, and perhaps on the disposition of your pastor. But that was a growing experience within the Church.

But in 1973, when the Missal that we currently use was promulgated, it was the first time we had a text that was in English in its entirety. And we'd moved to a situation, for the most part universal, where in places where English was the, shall we say, the dominant language, that the liturgy would be celebrated majorly, if not exclusively, in English. Now, there seems to be good reason to say, and I suppose I'm in a position to know, in that I hold the archives that document all of this, that at that stage, it was envisaged already that there would be a renewal of this translation relatively quickly. And there were slight tweakings of that translation. Throughout the seventies, little things were changed. It was, as a rule – I think the general intent at that stage [was] that the translation that was issued in 1973 might last ten years. So it's amazing it's lasted forty years. Well, if it's lasted forty years, why can't it last a hundred, or four hundred years?

Well... I suppose one of the things that we need to take into consideration is that when you enter into an experience that is entirely new, and which really in one sense, there are no predetermined parameters, you're learning as you go along. And our experience as a church of vernacular liturgy is still young. Young enough to be within the lifetime of quite a number of people who are in this Church this afternoon, myself included. My earliest years – in fact, my Sacraments of initiation – were in the pre-Vatican II rites, and that may be true of some of you here this afternoon. So within a lifetime, there has

been a tremendous change, and a tremendous development. And of course, at the same time, there has to be a process whereby that development, that change, is appraised, is assessed.

Now, at the time in the Council when it became clear, in terms of what was happening in Rome among the fathers, that vernacular liturgy was going to be very much on the cards, a group of English-speaking bishops gathered together and came to a decision – this was in 1964, so before the close of the council – that rather than all of them work independently and individually, that they would pool their efforts, that they would collaborate internationally to produce texts in English. And so, the International Committee (as it was then) for English in the Liturgy, ICEL, came into being, and it was initially these territories: the United States, Canada, England and Wales, Scotland, Ireland, India, Pakistan, Australia, New Zealand, and South Africa. Ten territories, that you'll immediately recognize, represent the largest number of English speakers in the world. The territories that are majorly populated by people whose first language is English. A year later, the Philippines joined the team. And those eleven bishops' conferences have, from that day to this, formed ICEL.

What is ICEL? That's also a very reasonable question, one that I couldn't answer very competently until I found myself in this job. You may have an idea of what it's all about, but let me just give you a few basic facts. ICEL is a commission of eleven bishops – one from each of those territories that I've just named – who represent their conference and work to produce liturgical translations for their territory, working in collaboration. They are, of course, supported in that work by others, other bishops, scholars who are ordained, religious, lay people, male, female – extending to quite a large number of collaborators on the international stage. So we can say, really, in the truest sense, that this is a work of the Church, it's also very much a work of human hands. It involves a lot of people.

So the translation that was made and was implemented in 1973 was the work of that collaboration, and it was made in accordance with criteria, guidelines, that were laid down by the church, in a charter for the translation of Latin liturgical texts into vernacular languages, which is known by its French title, *Comme le prevoit* – “As it is foreseen” that there will be vernacular translations, it goes on to say. And that's really a charter explaining how translations should be made. And as the result of that, of the translations that came about, not only in English, but all other languages that are used as liturgical languages, we have versions of the Catholic liturgy – not only the Mass, but the Liturgy of the Hours and all of our sacramental rites – in our own language. And the style of translation that was adopted at that stage, and really is expressed by those guidelines, is a form of English that is not very different from the form of English we use every day in ordinary transactions. Not at our most conversational, but when we're

trying to be clear, and speaking English perhaps in an everyday way, but in a reasonably formal context. That's the liturgical language that we have.

Throughout the 1980s – so after these translations had already been put into use – ICEL conducted three surveys at different points, in the eleven member conferences, to try and come to some understanding of how these texts were being received. And the results of those surveys, perhaps boiled down to their essentials, yielded three ideas which were significant for the fact that they kept cropping up. So these ideas didn't appear once or twice; they were expressed by a lot of different people, in a lot of different situations – and this is what those three ideas were, put at their most simple.

There was a concern, at that stage, that the translation that we use didn't seem to convey *all* of the content of the Latin original. Perhaps put another way, that some of the ideas that are present in the original text don't seem to have made it, at least into English. English is not alone in that respect; of course, there is the difficulty of coping with a language which is an ancient language no longer spoken as an everyday language, and a language like English which has become a world language, very much in our lifetimes once again, and is in a continual state of flux. I've sort of had to learn different ways of saying things so that people can understand what I mean. It's not really learning a different language, but it's learning a different way of using the language. That's the first idea.

The second idea that a lot of people expressed was that the translation that we currently have seems to have lost some of the vocabulary that we use to express ideas of faith and the experience of our life in Christ. Quite naturally, those aren't words that we tend to use in everyday conversation. Ideas like salvation, redemption – these are technical terms, aren't they, that have a defined meaning in our theological understanding, and so are evident, are found, in our liturgical worship. So there was a concern that there was a loss of some of those ideas, and because the concepts aren't mentioned in that way, that perhaps there was a lesser understanding of those ideas, gradually, among our own people.

The third idea – last idea – was that some people felt that because of the closeness of the register – and that's a technical term, that means a sort of type of language used in a particular situation – because of the closeness of the register of language in our liturgical texts to our everyday use of language, there was something about it that was perhaps not ideally suited to liturgical worship. This is a contentious point, but it was a point which was evidenced in people's responses to the survey. One of the ideas that informs that fear is the fact that if you give people a liturgy in the form of language they use every day, you hand to them on a plate the ability the ability to manipulate and change that liturgy.

I had a very interesting experience of that recently when I went to the funeral Mass of the mother of one of my coworkers in a parish. It was a beautiful liturgy; it's a great parish, with a very good pastor. But there was not a single line from the sign of the Cross until the final commendation of that liturgical celebration that was in accordance with the way that it appears in the liturgical books. Now, if I'd gone up to the pastor afterwards and said, "Father, do you realize you're not saying what it says in the book?" I think he would have been absolutely horrified. I'm sure it had got to a stage now where he was probably not even aware of the fact that large quantities of the liturgy had been so personalized, and so interiorized, because the book was no longer needed, and the liturgy is celebrated as a living thing, that it had parted company with a printed text.

So those were three ideas that emerged during the eighties. So, how did the Church respond to this? Well, there were various tentatives, particularly in the latter part of the eighties, to produce a revised translation, and a revised translation got to the last stage of preparation, at a time when the Holy See decided to redefine the charter for the process of the translation of liturgical texts. And as a result, in 2001, that new charter, that new outline, for how this is to be done, was published by the Holy See. And so, the process began again.

And that process, really, has taken exactly ten years, from then, till now. Ten years from 2001 to 2011. Why did it take so long? Well, it's a big text. It's the most complicated liturgical book that we have with the possible exception of the Liturgy of the Hours, and because I explained to you at the outset, this is a collaborative process that involves over 700 English-speaking bishops, and the churches and communities that they represent throughout the world, it takes time.

How do you make a translation? Well, first of all, one person, a man or a woman who has the necessary skill to be able to do this, produces what we call a base, or beginning, translation. That, then, is worked on by a small group, in this case, of bishops, who have the necessary skills to be able to do that work – that's the editorial committee. And as a result of their work, that text then goes to the eleven bishops who represent all of the conferences. They take it back to their own conferences, at which stage we call this text a "green book." That's the color of the cover. They discuss this. They make suggestions. All of those suggestions come back to a little office in D.C. where we have to try to make sense of it and apply those insights as best we can, trying to, in an even-handed and wise way, pick our way through the difficulties of this process. One that's been done the text goes back to the conferences again, this time as a grey book. (Because it has a grey cover.) Then they vote on the text, and when they've agreed in their voting, sufficiently, that text is submitted by the conferences to the Congregation for Divine Worship and the Discipline of the Sacraments in Rome, which has responsibility for liturgy in the Church as a whole, and then the final stage of preparation of those texts is in their hands. I should say that the Congregation has the right to amend, and to develop the

text at any stage in the process – they’re consulted at various stages – and even up to and including the last stage of preparation.

So that gives you a rough idea, in broad terms, of how the translation is made. Now, what do we think that we’re getting in terms of this new translation? Don’t forget, we’re limiting ourselves at this stage to very basic concepts. Well, I think we are getting, unambiguously, a fuller expression of the content of the meaning in the original texts. Ideas which didn’t formerly appear in our English text are there now. That might be a surprise in some senses, particularly with prayers that we’re very familiar with. “Lord, I am not worthy to receive you, but only say the word and I shall be healed,” becomes “Lord, I am not worthy that you should enter under my roof. Say only the word and my soul shall be healed.” Sounds quite different, doesn’t it? But if you know where that idea comes from – it comes from the biggest single source of our liturgical texts, the Scriptures – that is a direct quotation from the Gospels, which is the text as it appears in Latin. So there’s a richness of a resonance with the Word of God that becomes evident in the new translation that perhaps is not so immediately evident in the translation that we currently use.

That’s one idea. Secondly, and perhaps just as a development of that, there is a more obvious connection with the Scriptures. Because the Scriptures are such a source of our liturgical texts, all of those scriptural allusions in our prayers – you probably realize already that most of the prayers of the Mass are knitted together from phrases or even complete ideas and lines that are taken from the Scriptures. Well, it’s a hope in this translation that that resonance with Scripture will be much more obvious.

The third idea – the last one. I identified three problems that people seemed to feel were significant; these are three responses now to those problems in the new translation. There is a recovery of the vocabulary of faith, which helps enrich our understanding of the mystery that we celebrate. That has been contentious. You all have read, quite possibly, articles, scholarly and otherwise, about words which are not everyday words. The favorite ones are “consubstantial” ... at an earlier stage of the process, although not so much of an issue in the translation as it will come to us ... “ineffable.” And there is a consideration of how appropriate it is for us to change the vocabulary set that is contained in the liturgy.

Perhaps it’s most helpful at this point for us to consider that what we believe is expressed in the way that we worship, and should be evidenced in the way that we worship, both in the physical action of our worship, and in the content of our worship. For that reason, I think as well as musicians, the other group in the church who first realized the significance of having such a change was catechists. Realizing, of course, that there was about to be a very big job. And I think that the work of catechesis, whether we are formally identified as catechists or not, will be a task in which we *all*

share. Surely catechesis is helping everyone to come to deeper knowledge and experience of their faith.

It's a rather commonplace idea, particularly among people who dress like this (*gestures towards himself*), that they don't know anything about the liturgy, and I'm going to stay out of this. You'd be amazed how many people express that view – how many priests, how many bishops – realizing that the liturgy as an arena is contentious; [they] just want to stand back and let it all happen. You may have heard that view expressed; you may have expressed it yourself. Isn't it the truth, though, that for the largest number of our Catholic people, the main way in which they engage with the Church is in the liturgy. It is. It is. So we can't absolve (technical term) ourselves from an involvement in what is the basic experience of the largest number of people in the Church. It's good that we feel passionate about it, and that's why there are going to be strong feelings. It would be less than appropriate if that were not the case. People express strong views about things which are important to them, and there's perhaps nothing more important in our life together in the Church than the liturgy that we celebrate together.

So, what is there to do? Well, I think first of all, this is a moment of unparalleled opportunity. Or you may prefer the word challenge, depending how you perceive it. But certainly, all of us will be touched by this. Rolling with the opportunity idea, it's really an invitation to all of us to deepen our knowledge and understanding of what it means to be a Christian, what we're doing when we gather together to celebrate the liturgy. In a very real sense, I think it is an invitation for us to take a further step towards the full, conscious, and active participation in the liturgy which the Council called for, and the way that we will do that is by engaging as wholeheartedly as possible with the task of immersing ourselves in the liturgical life of the Church. I would imagine that's something that resonates with you easily. You wouldn't be here if that were not the case, and you wouldn't be doing what you do in your parishes if that were not true.

Thirdly, and I think that this is really important, it's an opportunity after forty years for us to stop and think about the way we do things. For us to evaluate the experience that we have of celebrating the Mass. If the celebration of the Eucharist is the source and the summit of the Church's life, then we are right to be serious about it. So, perhaps it means turning again to things that we looked at a long time ago and thought we knew and look at again now and find that we know rather less well than we thought. *Sacrosanctum concilium*, the foundation document for the liturgical renewal. The *General Instruction on the Roman Missal*, the document which appears at the beginning of the missal but governs all of the norms that determine our celebration of the liturgy together.

I think for all of us – I've already mentioned the catechetical task, which we will all, to a greater or lesser extent, be involved in – but of course, it's going to really demand that

we give ourselves to the task of becoming familiar with something which is new. It's a change. You may feel that change is a threat. I like to rather parody two responses to change as evidenced in the thought of two great churchmen from my own country. They were living at the same time during the nineteenth century. They were both Catholics. They were both converts from what you would call Episcopalianism, and they both entered the same religious family in the Church. One was responsible for starting a community in Birmingham, which became the Birmingham Oratory; the other, a oratory and community in London.

Blessed John Henry Newman said, "To live is to change. To be holy is to have changed often." At the same time as Newman was saying that, his own confrere, Frederick Faber, superior of the London Oratory, said, "All change is for the worst, even when it's for the better." *(laughter)*

Now, you have a choice. Which of those most appeals to you as an explanation of what we're all going to live through very shortly? Is the invitation to change the invitation to grow in holiness, or is it something to be resisted, because all change is for the worst, even when it's for the better, but I just sort of can't get myself into it. Well, if we find the challenge a threat, we've been very human, and I think we have to be forgiven that. And there will be a very real bereavement for something that we've known and loved very well for forty years, which is a long time – it's more than one generation, really, in modern terms. And this liturgy which has fed our spiritual lives and which has inspired us along the path to holiness, something which we've come to be very familiar with and love a lot, is changing.

So what sort of ideas can guide us through the potential challenge of the change? These are my last thoughts for this first session together before we move to a more focused consideration of the musical task.

It's the same Mass. But it's going to sound different. We are worshipping in the same way. The rite has not been changed. But the words which are a vehicle for our liturgical celebration are in some places quite different. And initially, an experience of familiarity will be replaced with a lack of familiarity. But sometimes, you know, when something is less familiar and you don't know what the next word is, you become more attentive. You become more engaged. And ideas which would never have occurred to you before suddenly come into your mind. For all of us, it's going to take time. First of all, it's going to take more time than it usually takes, because we're going to have to do it slower than we currently do. So, if your ideal is the thirty-minute Mass on a Sunday, this is bad news for you. *(laughter)*

And this will need very careful handling, particularly if you're a pastor, for those souls who are looking to the thirty-minute Mass. You know, we smile because we recognize – we smile because it's true. We smile because there are perhaps some, perhaps many, for

whom that's as much as they can manage, that's as much as they want. They belong in the Church too. But it is going to take more time. We're going to have to be careful in our personal study of something which is new to us, and it will take more time as we become gradually familiar with a new presentation of something that we know so well. So really, this is a great invitation, because it's a work of the Church. The liturgy is ultimately something we receive from the Church, and not make for ourselves. Something we have to, as all gifts, receive and treasure. We will all want to cooperate and collaborate for that to be possible.

(an audience member interjects: a question about "going back to the Latin")

Well, we can never get away from going back to the Latin, because our liturgical texts are in Latin. We are not a national church that operates purely in English; we are not a cooperative of English-speaking churches that just operates in English. We are a universal Church, where celebrating the same liturgy and meditating on the same Scriptures is an expression of that universality. And our liturgical texts, throughout our tradition, at least from the earliest centuries to the present time, are a body of texts which are in Latin. So we can't get away from that. But are you thinking really of a move towards more actual use of Latin in liturgical celebrations...?

(The audience member continues, bringing up the "and with your spirit" wording and wondering if this can be characterized as a "reactionary" change.)

No, because if you're a Spanish speaker, that's what you'll always have said, you know. *Y con tu espíritu*. So, it will, on one level, although it doesn't come across as a very nice answer, it's going to be "And with your spirit" because that's what it *means*. But of course, we have to go beyond that facetious, rather sort of indignant reply, to try and understand what's being communicated in that. Perhaps I can hold that over – that particular "and with your spirit" question – and we'll start the next session with that.