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Bishops approve final translations of Missal

Patricia Zapor Catholic News Service | Nov. 18, 2009

BALTIMORE -- The U.S. bishops approved the English translation and U.S. adaptations of five final sections of the Roman Missal in voting on the second day of their annual fall general assembly in Baltimore.

With overwhelming majority votes, the bishops approved translations of the proper of the saints, specific prayers to each saint in the universal liturgical calendar; the commons, general prayers for celebrating saints listed in the "Roman Martyrology"; the Roman Missal supplement; the U.S. propers, a collection of orations and formularies for feasts and memorials particular to the U.S. liturgical calendar; and U.S. adaptations to the Roman Missal.

There was some debate on the floor about a separate piece of the translations -- the antiphons -- which has not come to the bishops for consideration, but instead has advanced through the Vatican's approval procedures without the consultation of the English-language bishops' conferences around the world.

But the final five sections of the missal before the bishops passed with minimal discussion and only a handful of proposed amendments to the texts.

Each translation needed to pass by a two-thirds majority of the Latin-rite bishops. Each of the five pieces received at least 88 percent of the bishops' votes.

It's been nearly six years since the U.S. bishops began considering pieces of a new English translation of the missal. In June they approved four texts, containing prayers and prefaces for various occasions, votive Masses and Masses for the dead; solemn blessings for the end of Mass and prayers over the people and eucharistic prayers for particular occasions.

During the bishops' spring meeting, Bishop Arthur J. Serratelli of Paterson, N.J., chairman of the bishops' Committee on Divine Worship, this summer warned the bishops that if they failed to approve the texts by the end of November, they risked being shut out of the process by the Vatican.

Each of the English-language bishops' conferences has gone through or is going through the same process. Once all the information is received at the Vatican, the Congregation for Divine Worship must grant its "recognitio," or approval, to proceed with the translations.

After the passage of the texts, the bishops returned to a concern raised by Bishop Donald W. Trautman of Erie, Pa., over a shortcut being taken by the Vatican in the process for approving the antiphons section of the missal.

Bishop Trautman pointed out that the body of bishops had never been given the chance to review the translations of the antiphons.

Bishop Serratelli explained that with the Vatican congregation pushing the bishops' conferences to speed up their work on translations, his committee had consulted and agreed to let the Vatican translate the antiphons.

Cardinal Francis E. George, president of the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops, concurred and signed off on it.

But, Bishop Trautman noted, the shortcut violates the Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy, the Second Vatican Council document that ordered an extensive revision of worship so that people would have a clear sense of their own involvement in the liturgy.

"We are dealing with a significant doctrinal/magisterial issue," Bishop Trautman said. Despite the Vatican's sense of urgency in moving the translations along, "we don't want to send the message that we can bypass" that constitution, he said.

"We need to give our best efforts to the translation of the missal," Bishop Trautman said. "And on the antiphons we have given no effort."

Ultimately the bishops rejected Bishop Trautman's motion to have the USCCB hold off on submitting final approval of the missal translation until they had the chance to review the antiphons.

Instead, they approved a motion suggested by Cardinal Roger M. Mahony of Los Angeles and made by Cincinnati Archbishop Daniel E. Pilarczyk to formally approve the action taken by Cardinal George in agreeing to the Vatican congregation translating the antiphons.

The translations approved Nov. 17 will, like the previously approved sections, be compiled into a new missal for use in English-speaking countries. Bishop Serratelli said while the Vatican approval process moves along, dioceses will begin preparing to use the new missal translation when it is ready.

To help both priests and the laity prepare for the changes, the USCCB has posted catechetical materials at www.usccb.org/romanmissal.

Among the changes people will notice in the new translation is a rephrasing in the Nicene Creed. It will read, in part: "I believe in one God, the Father almighty, maker of heaven and earth, of all things visible and invisible, and in one Lord Jesus Christ, ... begotten not made, consubstantial with the Father."

That section of the Nicene Creed currently reads: "We believe in one God, the Father, the Almighty, maker of heaven and earth, of all that is seen and unseen. We believe in one Lord Jesus Christ, ... begotten not made, one in being with the Father."

In the "Ecce Agnus Dei," ("Behold the Lamb of God") the people will say, "Lord, I am not worthy that you should enter under my roof, but only say the word and my soul shall be healed."

Currently, they say: "Lord, I am not worthy to receive you, but only say the word and I shall be healed."

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