

# The Deacon's Corner by Deacon Ron Desmarais

## *Gloria in Excelsis Deo!*

The General Instruction of the Roman Missal describes the Gloria as "a most ancient and venerable hymn by which the Church, gathered in the Holy Spirit, glorifies and entreats God the Father and the Lamb" (no. 53).

So starts the commentary on the 3rd Editions rendering of the Gloria. Wanting to continue my commentary on the changes to our prayers and responses coming in November I would like talk about the Gloria. Using the formula I previously used I will present the Gloria with the highlighted changes. I have also included some commentary from the Bishop's website. Then I would like to speak on those changes.

Both the Gloria and Creed have the most extensive changes affecting what we have been reciting for the last 40 years. So here is the Gloria:

*Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace to people of good will.*

*We praise you, we bless you, we adore you, we glorify you, we give you thanks for your great glory, Lord God, heavenly King, O God, almighty Father.*

*Lord Jesus Christ, Only Begotten Son, Lord God, Lamb of God, Son of the Father, you take away the sins of the world, have mercy on us; you take away the sins of the world, receive our prayer; you are seated at the right hand of the Father, have mercy on us.*

*For you alone are the Holy One, you alone are the Lord, you alone are the Most High, Jesus Christ, with the Holy Spirit, in the glory of God the Father. Amen.*

Much of the text of the Gloria comes from Scripture: the first lines are derived from the Angels heralding the glad tidings of Christ's birth in Luke 2:14 - "*Glory to God in the highest and on earth peace to those on whom his favor rests.*" (NAB) This reading is found in the oldest representatives of the Western and Alexandrian text traditions and is the preferred one; the Byzantine text tradition, on the other hand, reads: "*on earth peace, good will toward men.*"

Turning to the second sentence of the Gloria, we notice something striking - we recover entire phrases that were left out of the current Gloria. Right now, we sing, "we worship you, we give you thanks, we praise you for your glory." However, the Latin text of the hymn offers five successive ways in which we should pay homage to God: "*We praise you, we bless you, we adore you, we glorify you, we give you thanks for your great glory.*" Liturgical prayer is enhanced by poetic repetition, and these five descriptions of worship do hold subtle distinctions. Something is lost in our praise of God when reduce it to just "*we worship you*"

The addition of "*Only Begotten Son*" recovers a key phrase from the Latin text - "Fili Unigenite." This is a venerable title of Jesus Christ, which speaks of the fact that the Son of God comes forth from the Father, yet is no less an eternal Person of the Divine Trinity. Why is this important? This is important because in the early church heresies were introduced that called this into question. Some heresies even referred to Satan as a competing son rather than as an angel. Even today New Agers are attempting to blur the lines so the church

continually has to reinforce its teachings. We recite the Creed in the same way to refute the heresies that called into question the "sonship" of Jesus Christ, Mary as the Mother of God and others. Entire church councils were called to combat these heresies, Arianism being one of the largest arising in the 4<sup>th</sup> Century and lasting almost 200 years.

Unlike our current Gloria, the new text includes two lines (rather than one) that begin with "*you take away the sins of the world,*" thereby reflecting the Latin text. By regaining this line and an additional "*have mercy on us*" in the next line, we return to the classic threefold structure of supplication: "have mercy on us... receive our prayer... have mercy on us." Immediately following this we have the threefold repetition of "You alone..." We also see this sort of structure in the Kyrie and Lamb of God, as well as in the Act of Contrition when we repeat say, "...in my thoughts and in my words, in what I have done and in what I have failed to do..."

I would like to say up front that I think this is a better prayer than our previous Gloria. I say this because we needed to be reminded of whom and what we are coming to Mass thank and praise. The Bishop's did not make these changes lightly. One of their major goals was to bring our prayer to a higher level; the other was to bring our prayers into line with the Latin text and to resonate our belief in words that reflect what we actually believe.

I'm not going to deny that there will be some people who will not like these changes or find fault with what the church is trying to accomplish. I would even concede that some of their objections might even have some validity. However, all of these objections and foot dragging have been going on for 40

years. Can you believe that? Forty Years! There are those who have been pushing for inclusive language, removing gender pronouns, and rewording scripture to bring politically correct terminology to the sacred writings. This is why it has been so difficult to work out all these issues and has taken so long.

I don't want to get into that, but we need to be aware of what has caused this to drag on. In a way I am a purist in that I believe scripture should remain as true to the original to include the good, the bad, and the ugly. Footnotes are made to clarify word choices, situations, and explain. We need to know what scripture says and conversely we need to know why we say the prayers that we do. We need to know what is important to our faith for salvation and what can be understood to be the sign of the times. (i.e., what society was like and how it "may" have affected the writer - this is called the Historical Criticism method when studying scripture.) For example, St. Paul talks about head coverings for women, as well as the length of their hair. We no longer regard that as a hard and fast rule anymore. However, Muslims are adamant about not only covering the head, but the entire body.

The important thing to remember here is that the "new" prayers are only a better reflection of the Latin prayers that are the basis for the prayers of the church. What has changed is inserting what was missing in English and reflecting the original Latin text. They have been translated to English, but they have also been translated into all the vernacular languages of the church (i.e., Spanish, German, Urdu, Korean, etc.) Let us not become so parochial that we only think about English. Remember catholic means universal. So other languages may have an even harder time refining the nuances of Latin into their language.