

The New Roman Missal

Participation at Mass will not change

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By Sr. Ann Rehrauer

Educators remind us that we learn and remember only a small amount of what we read. We remember more when we hear something and also see it in print. But we retain the most knowledge when we see, hear and interact with it. Participation is the key to full learning. When we participate in something, it becomes part of us. This is true of intellectual knowledge but also of other “learnings” in life.

One of the most quoted passages from the “Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy” (#14) concerns participation at Mass: “Mother Church earnestly desires that all the faithful should be led to that full, conscious and active participation in liturgical celebrations which is demanded by the very nature of the liturgy, and to which the Christian people, ‘a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a redeemed people’ (1 Pt. 2:9, 4-5) have a right and obligation by reason of their baptism.”

Participation was not a novel idea in 1963 when the Constitution was issued by the fathers of the Second Vatican Council. But a new impetus was given to the role of the laity at Mass by the Constitution and new opportunities for participation were offered by the structural changes in Mass that implemented the council’s vision.

Since the liturgy is celebrated in English, it seems easier to sing and pray the texts of the Mass.

In addition to the role of the choir, server and usher, there are many opportunities for ministerial participation. Both men and women serve as lectors, commentators, cantors and song leaders, instrumentalists, servers and extraordinary ministers of holy Communion. The congregation is encouraged to sing and the choir now leads, teaches and supports congregational singing rather than substituting for it. The Our Father is prayed by all of us, rather than being sung by a soloist. The “General Intercessions” provide the opportunity to pray for local as well as the general needs of people.

While singing, praying and liturgical ministry are examples of active participation, we sometimes forget about the internal dimension of participation. Participation also involves paying attention, letting God’s word move our hearts, having a willingness to be transformed and to leave the church different than when we entered. Internal participation means “meaning” the words we speak.

Participation that is full, conscious and active involves the entire congregation, is intentional, and includes singing, praying, speaking, kneeling, standing, processing, focusing, surrendering to

God's grace and joining our lives to the sacrifice of Jesus. It means attuning our minds and hearts and bodies to the words we speak and sing.

This level of participation is demanded by the very nature of the liturgy which is the prayer and worship offered by the entire church. It is our right to offer the liturgy and to pray for others, and because of our baptismal priesthood, it is also our obligation to do so.

As we prepare to receive a new Missal and to pray with new words this November, perhaps we need to think again about how well and how fully we enter into this great prayer of thanks, how willing we are to surrender to God's action and how consciously we share in offering the perfect sacrifice of Christ to the Father.

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