

STEWARDSHIP OF WORSHIP

Christian Stewards are followers of Jesus Christ who receive God's gifts gratefully, tend and cherish them responsibly and with accountability; they share God's gifts with justice and love, and they return them with increase to the Lord. If we base our commitment to Christian stewardship on the understanding that everything in our lives is God's gift to us, we would see that the Mass is perhaps one of the most important and sacred gifts of all.

When people complain about what people wear to Mass, those who don't care say, "Well, at least we're here." That's true, and the sacrifice made to be at Mass is usually quite generous. However, when we consider the sanctity of the gift we are given at Mass, we have to wonder whether or not the least we have to give is really enough. Our celebration of the Mass demands the best that we have to give: the best of our attention, the best of our abilities to respond, the best of our affection and concern for one another.

As I reflect on the changes to the responses and prayers of the Roman Missal to be implemented on the First Sunday of Advent, I can understand Pope John Paul II's reasons for the new translation. He was the Pontiff who travelled the world. He saw the Roman Catholic Church in action on every continent. He was well acquainted with the weaknesses of the English translation for the current Missal. He knew there were abuses in the ways priests were leading the worship. He understood well the fact that so many people had stopped caring about the awesome mysteries we celebrate, and their meaning in our lives. There are many good reasons for these changes. At the very heart of the matter, though, is that there has been a growing awareness that people no longer seem to see the value of the Mass as the sacred gift of God's loving presence in our lives and the blessing of salvation for the world.

What the Church is asking us to do is hard. It is inconvenient. We might even think this new translation to be imposed on us, in a heavy-handed way, from above. Our challenge is to look beyond these negative attitudes to see that the importance of the Mass goes far beyond what is convenient. It is such a sacred act, we need to make a more profound investment of our efforts. While we may resent being told that we have to do better, sometimes that's exactly the message we need to hear.

The Third Translation of the Roman Missal is, I hope, just the beginning of a long list of changes that need to take place in the life of the Church. My hope is that it is going to be the kind of beginning that will, in time, impact our commitment to living as stewards who care so deeply about the Church and her mission that we will embrace these changes with real enthusiasm and zeal because everything we do as a Church is an extension of the Eucharist and of our worship of God.