



Today we begin looking at the Liturgy of the Eucharist with the Offertory. This is when the gifts of bread and wine are brought to the altar, and they are prepared for the Consecration. The Offertory is a Proper of the Mass. Its text changes from Mass to Mass. An interesting thing to note is that the text of the Offertory Antiphon is not printed in the Roman Missal. Why then, would a required part of the Mass, which is specifically prescribed by the Church, be excluded from the Church's official prayer book for the Mass?

Unlike a good Sherlock Holmes novel, this one has a very simple answer. Recall that the Antiphons at Mass are drawn from the Church's official songbook - the Roman Gradual. There are actually several versions of the Roman Gradual, each one corresponding to the resources available to the local Church. In the first place is the Roman Gradual. It is the gold standard. If you find yourself unable to successfully use the Roman Gradual, the Church lets you “turn down the difficulty level” by using the Gradual Simplex (literally, the Simple Gradual). For various reasons, the simpler musical settings in the Gradual Simplex can be very beneficial (i.e. there is no choir, or no rehearsal time, etc.). Because the music has been simplified, the text is also modified to make it more attainable (and so that the music “fits” more appropriately to the text).

Now what if there is no choir or music minister at all? In your typical daily Mass, there is often no such “trained musical expert”, and as such, it falls on the priest to proclaim the Antiphons. Trouble is that the priest is often not a trained musician, and he is doing other things at the times when Antiphons are to take place. To this end, the Church produced a third set of Antiphons, specifically meant to be spoken by the Priest. These are the texts printed in the Roman Missal. We can look at why the text would need to change based on speaking vs. singing at another time. For the moment, let us resolve our mystery. There is no Offertory Antiphon printed in the Roman Missal because the Priest cannot say it. He is busy preparing the altar, accepting the gifts, and then leading the Preface Dialogue. Since it is not possible for the priest to proclaim the Antiphon, it is only included in the books used by the music ministers.

St. Cecilia, St. Elizabeth of the Trinity...Pray for us!

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