

Tridentine Community News

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Beyond the New English Ordinary Form Missal: Other Issues With Approved Translations – Part 5

English in Non-Liturgical Prayers for the Laity: The Manual of Indulgences

Arguably the most official book of prayers for the lay Catholic is the *Enchiridion Indulgentiarum*. As the Latin edition is updated, corresponding English editions are produced. Unlike the Extraordinary Form Missal and Ritual, however, the pre-Vatican II Book of Indulgences is no longer an actively sanctioned edition. While the prayers it contains continue to be meritorious in their own right, the indulgences attached to them are no longer in force. The rules for Indulgences changed in 1968, and the list of specifically indulgenced prayers was shortened considerably. Still, it is instructive to compare the translations of prayers which have survived throughout successive editions. Note that while the English name for the Book of Indulgences has changed over time, the purpose remains the same.

As an example, let us compare the Prayer at the Beginning of the Day. First we present the most recent pre-Vatican II English version from 1957's *The Raccolta*, reflecting the 1950 Latin edition:

Lord God Almighty, who hast safely brought us to the beginning of this day, defend us in the same by thy mighty power, that this day we may fall into no sin, but that all our words may so proceed, and all our thoughts and actions may be so directed as to do always that which is just in Thy sight. Through Christ our Lord. Amen.

The 1991 *Handbook of Indulgences* reflected the 1986 Latin edition. This book made extensive use of modern English, as one can see:

Almighty God, you have given us this day: strengthen us with your power and keep us from falling into sin, so that whatever we say or think or do may be in your service and for the sake of your kingdom. We ask this through Christ our Lord. Amen.

The 2006 *Manual of Indulgences* mirrors the 1999 Latin edition. Published by the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops, some of its prayers return to more traditional wording. Like the forthcoming English Ordinary Form Missal, it is a more literal translation of the Latin which restores subtlety and detail to the text. A few of the prayers, though not this one, even restore us of the hierarchical pronouns Thee and Thou:

Lord, God Almighty, you have brought us safely to the beginning of this day. Defend us today by your mighty power, that we may not fall into any sin, but that all our words may so proceed and all our thoughts and actions be so directed, as to be always just in your sight. Through Christ our Lord. Amen.

A quandary arises with all three of the editions of the book: In many instances, the actual text of the prayer is not published, but rather only a mention of its name. For example, the 1991

Handbook prints the entire *Te Deum* in (modern) English, while the 2006 *Manual* only mentions that recitation of the *Te Deum* gains an Indulgence. Like the 2006 book, *The Raccolta* only names the *Te Deum*. It is not clear whether a vernacular recitation of the *Te Deum* qualified for an indulgence pre-Vatican II. The recently reprinted 1925 prayer book *Blessed Be God* contains a Douay-Rheims-ish English *Te Deum*, so presumably it was not unheard of to recite that prayer in English. Which English version is authorized for use nowadays? Logic would suggest the most recent one, from 1991. But what if one does not possess the now-obsolete 1991 *Handbook*? If the authorized vernacular text is hard to come by, what version should one use?

Some may contend that these are issues of scrupulosity. Yet codified prayer must have a specified form. Conceivably, translations of the *Te Deum* could evolve that depart substantially from the original Latin text. At what point do they become improper to use? At what point might they no longer actually qualify to gain the attached indulgence?

It would make sense to have a more complete *Manual of Indulgences*, with the complete Latin text of prayers on the left, and the complete, authorized English text of prayers on the right. If we have to rely on the “most recent” translations to determine what is the authorized English form, we could be stuck with Elizabethan English from the *Raccolta* for one prayer, adjacent to very casual English from the 1991 *Handbook* for the next prayer. It's enough to move one to pray the Latin forms – a fine idea, by the way – except even the original Latin *Enchiridion Indulgentiarum* suffers from the problem of only naming certain prayers, and not printing them out.

The recitation of prayers should not be a puzzle requiring juggling various books, one of which specifies the prayers, and another of which contains their contents. It's one thing for a hand missal to specify that for a certain weekday Mass, one should use the Mass from page X along with the Epistle from page Y; this is understandable given that hand missals must be thick books. The 2006 *Manual*, however, is a relatively thin publication. Adding the actual prayer contents would not significantly thicken it. While this is not an issue strictly pertaining to the vernacular, the current English book has done little to improve convenient usage.

Note the difference between our desire for standard English in the *Manual of Indulgences* and our previous argument supporting varying translations of the Orations of the Extraordinary Form Mass: Holy Mass can only be said in Latin. There need not be an authorized English translation of the Collects, as there is no opportunity to use those English translations liturgically. English is used solely to help the worshipper follow along with the Mass. With regards to the *Manual of Indulgences*, however, the form of the vernacular prayer does matter, as one is permitted to pray the vernacular to earn the indulgence. While not “liturgical” per se, these are private prayers with names and forms. Public devotions employ some of them. Take, for example, the *Salve Regina*: with the possible exception of thee/you, the prayer has a definitive form, allowing it to be prayed essentially unchanged by any congregation.