

Words in the *Roman Missal*, Third Edition

Some of the words used in the new translation of the Mass may be unfamiliar to some Catholics. The following list of definitions may help to increase your understanding of the rich theology that underlies these texts.

Abasement: The lowering of one of higher rank. Jesus abased himself in that, though he was God, he lowered himself and became a human being so that he might save us from our sins (see Phil 2:6-11).

Adoption: In Baptism, the Holy Spirit transforms us into children of the Father, thereby making us his adopted sons and daughters in the likeness of his eternal Son (see Eph 1:3-6). In this way, the faithful are made “partakers in the divine nature (cf. 2 Pt 1:4) by uniting them in a living union with the only Son, the Savior” (*Catechism of the Catholic Church* [CCC], no. 1129). In the sacraments, we become the sons and daughters of God by adoption through Christ Jesus.

Angels and archangels, cherubim and seraphim, thrones and dominions: Spiritual, personal, and immortal creatures, with intelligence and free will, who glorify God and serve him as messengers of his saving plan. Traditionally, the choirs of angels have been divided into various ranks, including archangels, cherubim, seraphim, thrones, dominions, principalities, and powers (see Col 1:16).

Chalice: From the Latin word “calix” meaning “cup” (see Ps 116:13; Mt 20:22; 1 Cor 10:16). The use of this term in the Liturgy points to the chalice’s function as a particular kind of cup and indicates the uniqueness of what it contains, the very Blood of Christ.

Clemency: The loving kindness, compassion, or mercy that God shows to sinners.

Communion: Our fellowship and union with Jesus and other baptized Christians in the Church, which has its source and summit in the celebration of the Eucharist. By receiving Jesus in Holy Communion, we are united to him and one another as members of his Body.

Consecration: The dedication of a thing or person to divine service by a prayer or blessing. In the Mass, “consecration” also refers to the words spoken by the priest whereby the bread and wine are transformed into the risen Body and Blood of Jesus.

Consubstantial: The belief, articulated in the Nicene Creed, about the relationship of the Father and the Son: that “in the Father and with the Father, the Son is one and the same God” (CCC, no. 262).

Contrite: To be repentant within one’s heart and mind for sins committed and to resolve not to sin again.

Covenant: A solemn agreement between human beings, between God and a human being, or between God and a people involving mutual commitments or promises. In the Old Testament, God made a covenant with the Jewish people. Jesus, through his death and Resurrection, made a new covenant with the whole of humanity. One enters into this new covenant through faith and Baptism.

Damnation: Eternal separation from God’s love caused by dying in mortal sin without repentance.

Godhead: The mystery of one God in three Persons: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

Homage: The honor, respect, and reverence due to another. Homage is especially due to God, for he is eternal, all good, all holy, and all loving.

Implore: To plead, beseech, or ask with humility. This is an example of the self-deprecatory language in the *Roman Missal* that helps to express our dependence on God. We humbly beg the Father to hear and answer our prayers, for we ask them in the power of the Holy Spirit and in the name of Jesus.

Incarnation: The Son of God assumed human nature and became man by being conceived by the Holy Spirit in the womb of the Virgin Mary. Jesus is true God and true man. As man, the Son of God obtained our salvation. The use of this term in the Nicene Creed indicates that Jesus’ birth has a significance beyond that of any other human birth.

Ineffable: That which cannot be conceived or expressed fully (see 1 Cor 2:6-9). One cannot, for example, adequately describe in concepts and words the mystery of the Trinity or the mystery of the Incarnation.

Infusion: The Holy Spirit is poured into the hearts and souls of believers, and so they are filled, or infused, with grace.

Intercessor: One who makes a petition on behalf of others. Our unique intercessor is Jesus Christ, who intercedes on our behalf with the Father (see Rom 8:34). The priest at Mass acting in the person of Christ intercedes on behalf of the whole Church.

Justification: The gracious action by which God frees us from sin and makes us holy and righteous before him.

Lord, God of Hosts: From the word “sabaoth,” hosts are the invisible powers that work at God’s command over heaven and earth.

Mediator: One who unites or reconciles separate or opposing parties. Thus, Jesus Christ is the “one mediator between God and the human race” (1 Tm 2:5). Through his sacrificial offering he has become high priest and unique mediator who has gained for us access to the Father through the Holy Spirit.

Merit: The reward that God promises and gives to those who love him and who by his grace perform good works. One cannot earn justification or eternal life; they are the free gifts of God. Rather our merit is from God through Christ in the Holy Spirit. The Father freely justifies us in Christ through the indwelling of the Spirit; and Christians, by the same Holy Spirit, are empowered to do good works of love and justice. In cooperating with the Holy Spirit, the faithful receive further grace and thus, in Christ, cooperate in the work of their salvation.

Oblation: A gift or sacrifice offered to God.

Only-Begotten Son: This title “signifies the unique and eternal relationship of Jesus Christ to God his Father: he is the only Son of the Father (cf. Jn 1:14, 18; 3:16, 18); he is God himself (cf. Jn 1:1)” (CCC, no. 454). Jesus is the Son of God not by adoption but by nature.

Paschal: Referring to Christ’s work of redemption accomplished through his Passion, death, Resurrection, and Ascension. Through the Paschal Mystery, Jesus destroyed our death and restored us to life. The Paschal Mystery is celebrated and made present in the Liturgy so that we can obtain the fruit of Jesus’ death and Resurrection, that is, the forgiveness of our sins and the new life of the Holy Spirit.

Patriarchs: Title given to the venerable ancestors or “fathers” of the Semitic peoples, Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, who received God’s promise of election.

Precursor: One who comes before as a herald. John the Baptist is the precursor of Jesus.

Provident grace: The free and undeserved gift that God gives us as he protects and governs all creation.

Redemption: Jesus Christ is our Savior and Redeemer because he frees us from our sin through his sacrificial death on the Cross.

Temporal: What pertains to this world of time and history, as opposed to what pertains to God, such as our new life in Christ through the indwelling of the Holy Spirit.

Venerate: To show devotion and respect to holy things and people. Catholics venerate relics and saints. Veneration must be clearly distinguished from adoration and worship, both of which pertain solely to the Trinity and Jesus as the Son of God.

REFERENCES

Catechism of the Catholic Church (2nd ed.). Washington, DC: United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, 2000.

General Instruction of the Roman Missal. Liturgy Documentary Series 2. Washington, DC: United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, 2003.

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