After a brief Holy Week hiatus, we continue our catechesis on the first Eucharistic Prayer, known as the Roman Canon. When we last left off, we had just finished the words of consecration. This week we discuss what is known as the Anamnesis. According to liturgical scholar Adrian Fortesque, most liturgies (East and West) end the words of institution with Christ’s command to do this in memory of him and continue with a prayer of assurance that we do indeed remember him always. In the Greek rites, this prayer is called the Anamnesis (meaning a “remembering”). The Roman Anamnesis is the Unde et memores, in which we recall that our participation in the Mass is a participation in the entire Paschal Mystery of Jesus Christ. The eastern liturgies name the passion, death, resurrection, and the expectation of the second coming. The Roman Anamnesis names the passion, resurrection and ascension only, though there have been forms of this prayer throughout history that have mentioned other events in the Lord’s life, namely the Nativity. With that, let us turn to the actual texts. As usual, let’s examine the current version:

Father, we celebrate the memory of Christ, your Son. We, your people and your ministers, recall his passion, his resurrection from the dead, and his ascension into glory; and from the many gifts you have given us we offer to you, God of glory and majesty, this holy and perfect sacrifice: the bread of life and the cup of eternal salvation.

Look with favor on these offerings and accept them as once you accepted the gifts of your servant Abel, the sacrifice of Abraham, our father in faith, and the bread and wine offered by your priest Melchizedek.

The new translation reads:

Therefore, O Lord, as we celebrate the memorial of the blessed Passion, the Resurrection from the dead, and the glorious Ascension into heaven of Christ, your Son, our Lord, we, your servants and your holy people, offer to your glorious majesty, from the gifts that you have given us, this pure victim, this holy victim, this spotless victim, the holy Bread of eternal life and the Chalice of everlasting salvation.

Be pleased to look upon these offerings with a serene and kindly countenance, and to accept them, as you were pleased to accept the gifts of your servant Abel the just, the sacrifice of Abraham, our father in faith, and the offering of your high priest Melchizedek, a holy sacrifice, a spotless victim. There are too many
differences to even place in bold let alone to allow for a word-for-word dissection. Instead, I would like to highlight the key differences.

First, the current translation incorrectly breaks the first paragraph into two sentences. Some will argue that this makes the text more easily understood, but unfortunately it also alters the meaning slightly. In the current translation, it seems that it is only the “memory” of Christ that is celebrated. It then continue to enumerate what about Christ we are recalling. The whole tone seems to be closer to a eulogy than it does to an explication of the meaning of the Mass. The Mass is the re-presentation of the entire Paschal mystery. What we celebrate is not merely a memory, but something far more real. In his text *The Spirit of the Liturgy*, Cardinal Ratzinger illustrates the importance of “memory” in the Jewish faith, that “remembering” is a real participation in the events that are being brought to mind:

“As a result of archaeological discoveries, we now know that the ancient synagogues were richly decorated with representations of scenes from the Bible. They were by no means regarded as mere images of past events, as a kind of pictorial history lesson, but as a narrative, which, while calling something to mind, makes it present” (SL, 117).

The Hebrew word for *anamnesis* is *zikaron*, and it too is more than simple recollection. The celebration of the Passover meal was more than a reenactment, but was believed to involve a participation in the original exodus from Egypt. *Zikaron* indicates a participation in an event of the past rather than simply a memory of that event. So too is our understanding of the Mass. It is a celebration of and a participation in the whole of the Paschal mystery. The new translation, using, “we celebrate the memorial of the blessed Passion, the Resurrection from the dead, and the glorious Ascension into heaven of Christ, your Son, our Lord,” does a much better job of illustrating the reality of participation.

Second, the are a few changes in the vocabulary of the first paragraph. Theologically, there is not much to discuss, but it is a common theme in comparing the current to the new: the current translation eliminates words and simplifies phrases. For instance, in the first paragraph alone we see “blessed” placed in front of “Passion” (from the Latin *beatae passionis*) and “his ascension into glory” changed to “his glorious ascension into heaven” (which is an accurate rendering of *in caelos gloriosae ascensionis*). We also have the changes of “people” and “ministers” to “servants” and “holy people.” It is curious that the current translation comes up with “ministers” because the Latin *servi* is a common first year vocabulary word meaning “servant.” The adjective *sancta* (“holy”) is also restored in the new translation. Further, as we have seen in several other places, the new translation refers correctly to “Chalice” (*Calicem*) instead of “cup.” Lastly, there is a change in adjectives modifying “life” and “salvation.” The Latin pair is *vitae aeternae* and *salutis perpetuae*. I have made the case before that “eternal” is a better choice for *aeternae* than “everlasting” not only because of the phonetic similarity, but also because eternity exists apart from time and is something distinct from “everlasting.” In fact there is a Latin words that is more appropriate for “everlasting,”
none other than perpetuae ("perpetual" would also be correct). The Latin in the phrase of the Anamnesis contains both adjectives, and the new translation properly draws the distinction.

The final change in the first paragraph is the description of what is offered. The current translation reads, “this holy and perfect sacrifice: the bread of life and the cup of eternal salvation,” whereas the new translation will instead be, “this pure victim, this holy victim, this spotless victim, the holy Bread of eternal life and the Chalice of everlasting salvation.” While it is relieving to see the word “sacrifice” in the current translation (most references to sacrifice had been suppressed), here is a case where the word is much stronger. It is a sacrifice that is offered, but it is not just any sacrifice. In continuity with the sacrifices of ancient Judaism, there is a victim: Jesus Christ. The prayer attempts to not only drill this in, but to do so in a three-fold construction. The Latin is: hóstiam puram, hóstiam sanctam, hóstiam immaculátam. The idea of a spotless or unblemished victim comes from 1 Peter 1:19 (“a lamb unblemished and spotless”) but also harkens back to many Old Testament references to “perfect sacrifices.” The three-fold description is important, for whenever there is a three-fold iteration the text is taken in the context of a superlative. For instance, “Holy, holy, holy,” is taken to mean, “the holiest that ever could be ... perfectly holy.” Here, the three-fold description of the victim (hostiam) is taken to mean “as pure as can possibly be ... perfect in every way.” When the three utterances are reduced to one, this sense of perfection is lost (certainly in the Latin, but so too in the English).

In the second paragraph, we find one of my favorite changes, at least aesthetically speaking. The current translation, in its typical “demanding” imperative, reads, “Look with favor on these offerings.” The Latin is actually much more beautiful and humble, and the new translation does a fine job of rendering it in English: “Be pleased to look upon these offerings with a serene and kindly countenance.” Not only is it much more polite (“Be pleased ...”) but also simply exquisite. It is the very countenance of God that we hope someday to see, and it is this same loving countenance that we now invoke.

Following this, we see the listing of the three Old Testament sacrifices. It is important to note that the sacrifice of Christ is the fulfillment of all previous sacrifices. The entire Letter to the Hebrews speaks to this reality. Therefore, in our Anamnesis it is proper that we recall those sacrifices of old and unite them with the sacrifice now being offered. However, the Latin, in listing the three Old Testament men, gives each of them a descriptor: “Abel the just” (iusti Abell), “Abraham, our father in faith” (Patriárchæ nostri Abrahæ), and “your high priest Melchizedek” (summus sacérdos tuus Melchísedech). The current translation leaves off the title of Abel, thereby interrupting the rhythm of the triple recollection. On a picky note, I would have rather seen the title of Melchizedek listed after the name for the sake of consistency. In this case, it would read, “Abel the just ... Abraham, our father in faith ... Melchizedek your high priest.” Of course, the Latin has the adjectives before the names, so another appropriate rendering would be “the just Abel ... our father in faith, Abraham ... your high priest Melchizedek.” (As a small point, it is unclear why the current translation inserted the words “bread and wine”
rather than “offering.” Presumably it was an attempt to better describe the Old Testament narrative of Melchizedek, but the words occur nowhere in the Latin.)

Finally, we see the entire Anamnesis culminate in the reiteration of the sacrifice now being offered: “a holy sacrifice, a spotless victim” (sanctum sacrificium, immaculátam hóstiam). Here we come full circle: we begin with the sacrifice of Christ, then tell of its foreshadowing in the Old Testament, then come back once more to the sacrifice of Christ in order to show it as the fulfillment of what came before. In the post synodal apostolic exhortation Verbum Domini, Pope Benedict says, “The New Testament is hidden in the Old and the Old is made manifest in the New.” The structure of the Anamnesis illustrates this as it moves from the sacrifice of Christ to the Old Testament sacrifices and then back again to Christ. Without this reiteration of “a holy sacrifice, a spotless victim” at the end, this beautiful rhetorical device is lost.