

BOOK REVIEW

*A Pastoral Commentary on the General Instruction of the Roman Missal.* By Joseph DeGrocco. Chicago, IL: Liturgy Training Publications, 2011. 242 pp. \$22.95. ISBN 978-1-61671-038-5.

A Google search for the words "Roman Missal" reveals 2.6 million results. In the Catholic world over the past few years there had perhaps been no bigger topic of discussion. There has certainly been no one greater issue among those dealing with the liturgy. The sheer volume of writing related to the Missal in the past months can almost be described as a "Missal genre." These works range from academic and theological writings focused on the translation process and the ecclesiology involved, to opinion pieces in Catholic periodicals and blogs (either positive or negative), as well as the hundreds of pastoral resources aimed at helping all of the faithful—priests and people—adjust to the new wording.

Monsignor DeGrocco's work does not fall into any of those categories. He does not deal with the translation process, does not give his own opinion, nor does he deal with any of the specific changes and wording to the Order of Mass itself. His work deals exclusively with the *General Instruction of the Roman Missal* (GIRM). This document, an introduction to the ritual text of the Mass, relates the background theology of the ritual itself, as well as some of the practical aspects of its celebration. Each major ritual in the Catholic Church has a *General Instruction*, or introductory section. They can be found before the *Rite of Marriage*, the *Order of Christian Funerals*, the *Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults*, and so on. The GIRM is perhaps the most commonly known, both for the changes that came with the new GIRM contained in Third Edition of the Roman Missal, as well as because the Mass is the most commonly celebrated of Catholic rituals.

What DeGrocco has done in this *Pastoral Commentary* is just that. He goes through the GIRM paragraph by paragraph and gives both an easy to follow explanation of what the paragraph means, as well as some practical pointers on how to apply it to a real-life parish situation. This book is meant to be read in conjunction with the actual text of the GIRM, as that text is not reprinted in the book. However, it is very easy to follow as DeGrocco uses the same numbering system as the GIRM itself. As stated in the preface, "As a commentary, this book is not meant to stand on its own, or even meant to be read on its own. It must be read in concert with the text of the GIRM; it is not meant to substitute for it or to serve as an authoritative source for the norms of celebrating Mass. Read in conjunction with the GIRM, this book seeks to offer further insight and points for reflection and discussion" (viii).

As such, this book is meant to be used in real life, pastoral settings. It will

be very helpful to priests and deacons as well as parish staffs and liturgy committees. Anyone tasked with taking the ideal liturgy as handed down by the Church and celebrating it in the real setting of the parish or community will find this work helpful. The implementation of the new translation of the *Roman Missal* this Advent has offered the Church in English-speaking nations the opportunity to step back and look more deeply into the Mass itself and how it is celebrated. Whether for a priest or parish looking at the *GIRM* or rubrics for the first time in months or years, a seminarian studying the *ars celebrandi*, or a theological student studying liturgy, this work will be a helpful resource.

As stated above, the book is organized by the paragraph numbers of the *GIRM* itself. The number is listed and the commentary follows. While the commentary generally flows from the *GIRM* as well as other documents on the liturgy issued by the Church, it often moves into practical considerations for different parish environments. This can be very beneficial, but at times more obvious distinction between the "official teaching" of the documents and the author's own opinion could be helpful.

Monsignor DeGrocco has written an easy to follow companion to the official Church introduction to the Church's most important work—the celebration of the Eucharist. In a time where opinions abound in the Church, especially regarding the liturgy, a practical and pastoral guide to the thinking and sacramental practice of the Church is especially needed. *A Pastoral Companion on the General Instruction of the Roman Missal* is a book that should be on the liturgical bookshelf of every parish, as it would greatly assist the parish in celebrating the sacred liturgy as the Church intends it to be celebrated.

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