

The Liturgical Year

General Preface

Dom Prosper Gueranger (1805 – 1875)

Prayer is man's richest boon. It is his light, his nourishment, and his very life, for it brings him into communication with God, who is light, nourishment, and life. But of ourselves we know not what we should pray for as we ought; we must needs, therefore, address ourselves to Jesus Christ, and say to Him as the apostles did: 'Lord, teach us how to pray.' (Luke 11:1) He alone can make the dumb speak, and give eloquence to the mouths of children; and this prodigy He effects by sending His Spirit of grace and of prayers, who delights in helping our infirmity, asking for us with unspeakable groanings. (Romans 8:26)

Now it is in the holy Church that this divine Spirit dwells. He came down to her as an impetuous wind, and manifested Himself to her under the expressive symbol of tongues of fire. Ever since that day of Pentecost, He has dwelt in this His favoured bride. He is the principle of everything that is in her. He it is that prompts her prayers, her desires, her canticles of praise, her enthusiasm, and even her mourning. Hence her prayer is as uninterrupted as her existence. Day and night is her voice sounding sweetly in the ear of her divine Spouse, and her words are ever finding a welcome in His Heart.

At one time, under the impulse of that Spirit, who animated the admirable psalmist and the prophets, she takes the subject of her canticles from the Books of the old Testament; at another, showing herself to be the daughter and sister of the holy apostles, she intones the canticles written in the Books of the new Covenant; and finally, remembering that she, too, has had given to her the trumpet and harp, she at times gives way to the Spirit who animates her, and sings her own new canticle. From these three sources comes the divine element which we call the liturgy.

The Prayer of the Church

The prayer of the Church is, therefore, the most pleasing to the ear and heart of God, and therefore the most efficacious of all prayers. Happy, then, is he who prays with the Church, and unites his own petitions with those of this bride, who is so dear to her Lord that He gives her all she asks. It is for this reason that our blessed Saviour taught us to say our Father, and not my Father; give us, forgive us, deliver us, and not give me, forgive me, deliver me. Hence we find that, for upwards of a thousand years, the Church, who prays in her temples seven times in the day and once again during the night, did not pray alone. The people kept her company, and fed themselves with delight on the manna which is hidden under the words and mysteries of the divine liturgy.

Thus initiated into the sacred cycle of the mysteries of the Christian year, the faithful, attentive to the teachings of the Spirit, came to know the secrets of eternal life; and, without any further preparation, a Christian was not unfrequently chosen by the bishops to be a priest, or even a bishop, that he might go and pour out on the people the treasures of wisdom and love, which he had drunk in at the very fountain-head.

For whilst prayer said in union with the Church is the light of the understanding, it is the fire of divine love for the heart. The Christian soul neither needs nor wishes to avoid the company of the Church, when she would converse with God, and praise His greatness and His mercy.

She knows that the company of the bride of Christ could not be a distraction to her. Is not the soul herself a part of this Church, which is the bride? Has not Jesus Christ said: 'Father, may they be one, as We also are one' (John 17:11) And, when many are gathered in His name, does not this same Saviour assure us that He is in the midst of them? (Matthew 18:20) The soul, therefore, may converse freely with her God, who tells her that He is so near her; she may sing praise, as David did, in the sight of the angels, whose eternal prayer blends with the prayer which the Church utters in time.

But now for many ages past, Christians have grown too solicitous about earthly things to frequent the holy vigils, and the mystical Hours of the day. Long before the rationalism of the sixteenth century had become the auxiliary of the heresies .of that period by curtailing the solemnity of the divine service, the people had ceased to unite themselves exteriorly with the prayer of the Church, except on Sundays and festivals. During the rest of the year, the solemn and imposing grandeur of the liturgy was gone through, and the people took no share in it. Each new generation increased in indifference for that which their forefathers in the faith had loved as their best and strongest food. Social prayer was made to give way to individual devotion. Chanting, which is. the natural expression of the prayers and even of the sorrows of the Church, became limited to the solemn feasts. That was the first sad revolution in the Christian world.

But even then Christendom was still rich in churches and monasteries; and there, day and night. was still heard the sound .of the same venerable prayers which the Church had used through all the past ages. So many hands lifted up to God drew down upon the earth the dew of heaven, averted storms, and won victory for those who were in battle.

These servants of God, who thus kept up an untiring choir that sang the divine praises, were considered as solemnly deputed by the people, which was still Catholic, to pay the full tribute of homage and thanksgiving due to God, His blessed Mother, and the saints. These prayers formed a treasury which belonged to all. The faithful gladly united themselves in spirit to what was done. When any affliction, or the desire to obtain a special favour, led them to the house of God, they were sure to hear, no matter at what hour they went, that untiring voice of prayer which was for ever ascending to heaven for the salvation of mankind. At times they would give up their worldly business and cares, and take part in the Office of the Church, and all still understood, at least in a general way, the mysteries of the liturgy.

The Reformation

Then came the so-called reformation, and at the outset it attacked the very life of Christianity: it would put an end to man's sacrifice of praise to God. It strewed many countries with the ruins of churches: the clergy, the monks, and virgins consecrated to God were banished or put to death; and in the churches which were spared the divine Offices were not permitted. In other countries, where the persecution was not so violent, many sanctuaries were devastated and irremediably ruined, so that the life and voice of prayer grew faint. Faith, too, was weakened; rationalism became fearfully developed; and now our own age seems threatened with what is the result of these evils-the subversion of all social order.

For, when the reformation had abated the violence of its persecution, it had other weapons wherewith to attack the Church. By these several countries which continued to be Catholic were infected with that spirit of pride which is the enemy of prayer. The modern spirit would have it that prayer is not action; as though every good action done by man were not a gift of God: a gift which implies two prayers, one of petition that it may be granted, and another of

thanksgiving because it is granted. There were found men who said: 'Let us abolish all the festival days of 'God from the earth' (Psalm 73:8) and then came upon us that calamity which brings all others with it, and which the good Mardochai besought God to avert from his nation, when he said: 'Shut not, Oh Lord, the mouths of them that sing to Thee,' (Esther 13:17)

But by the mercy of God we have not been consumed; there have been left remnants of Israel; and the number of believers in the Lord has increased. What is it that has moved the heart of our God to bring about this merciful conversion? Prayer, which had been interrupted, has been resumed. Numerous choirs of virgins consecrated to God, and, though far less in number, of men who have left the world to spend themselves in the divine praises, make the voice of the turtle-dove heard in our land. This voice is every day gaining more power: may it find acceptance from our Lord, and move Him to show the sign of His covenant with us, the rainbow of reconciliation! May our venerable cathedrals again re-echo those solemn formulae of prayer, which heresy has so long suppressed! May the faith and munificence of the faithful reproduce the prodigies of those past ages, which owed their greatness to the acknowledgement paid by all, even the very civic authorities, to the all-powerfulness of prayer!

But this liturgical prayer would soon become powerless were the faithful not to take a real share in it, or at least not to associate themselves to it in heart. It can heal and save the world, but only on the condition that it be understood. Be wise, then, ye children of the Catholic Church, and obtain that largeness of heart which will make you pray the prayer of your mother. Come, and by your share in it fill up that harmony which is so sweet to the ear of God. Where would you obtain the spirit of prayer if not at its natural source? Let us remind you of the exhortation of the apostle to the first Christians: 'Let the peace of Christ rejoice in your hearts; let the word of Christ dwell in you abundantly, in all wisdom; teaching and admonishing one another, in psalms, hymns, and spiritual canticles, singing in grace in your hearts to God.' (Colossians 3:15-16)

Other Methods of Prayer Not as Efficacious

For a long time, a remedy has been devised for an evil which was only vaguely felt. The spirit of prayer, and even prayer itself, has been sought for in methods and prayer-books, which contain, it is true, laudable, yea, pious thoughts, but after all only human thoughts. Such nourishment cannot satisfy the soul, for it does not initiate her into the prayer of the Church. Instead of uniting her with the prayer of the Church, it isolates her. Of this kind are so many of those collections of prayers and reflections, which have been published under different titles during the last two hundred years, and by which it was intended to edify the faithful, and suggest to them, either for hearing Mass, or going to the Sacraments, or keeping the feasts of the Church, certain more or less commonplace considerations and acts, always drawn up according to the manner of thought and sentiment peculiar to the author of each book. Each manual had consequently its own way of treating these important subjects. To Christians already formed to piety, such books as these would, indeed, serve a purpose, especially as nothing better was offered to them; but they had not influence sufficient to inspire with the spirit of prayer such as had not otherwise received it.

It may perhaps be objected that, were all practical books of Christian piety to be reduced to mere explanations of the liturgy, we should run the risk of impoverishing, and even destroying, by excessive formalities, the spirit of prayer and contemplation, which is such a precious gift of the Holy Ghost to the Church of God. To this we answer, firstly, that by asserting the

immense superiority of liturgical over individual prayer, we do not say that individual methods should be suppressed; we would only wish them to be kept in their proper place. Then secondly, we answer that in the divine psalmody there are several degrees: the lowest are near enough to the earth to be reached by souls that are still plodding in the fatigues of the purgative way; but in proportion as a soul ascends this mystic ladder, she feels herself illuminated by a heavenly ray; and still higher, she finds moon and rest in the sovereign Good.

Whence, for instance, did the holy doctors of the early ages, and the venerable patriarchs of the desert, acquire their spiritual knowledge and tender devotion, of which they have left us such treasures in their writings and their works? It was from those long hours of psalmody, during which truth, simple yet manifold, unceasingly passed before the eyes of their soul, filling it with streams of light and love.

What was it that gave to the seraphic Bernard that wonderful unction, which runs in streams of honey through all his writings? To the author of the Imitation of Christ that sweetness, that hidden manna, which seems ever fresh? To Louis Blossius, that inexpressible charm and tenderness which move the heart of every reader? It was the daily use of the liturgy, in the midst of which they spent their days, intermingling their songs of joy with those of their sorrow.

The Power of the Liturgy

Let not then the soul, the bride of Christ, that is possessed with a love of prayer, be afraid that her thirst cannot be quenched by these rich streams of the liturgy, which now flow calmly as a streamlet, now roll with the loud impetuosity of a torrent, and now swell with mighty heavings of the sea. Let her come and drink this clear water which springs up unto life everlasting; for this water flows from the very fountains of her Saviour; and the Spirit of God animates it by His virtue, rendering it sweet and refreshing to the panting stag. Neither let a soul that is in love with the charms of contemplation be afraid of the pomp and harmony of the chants of liturgical prayer, as though they could distract her; for what is this soul herself but an instrument of harmony responding to the touch of that divine Spirit who possesses her? Would she, when she wishes to enjoy the heavenly interview, comport herself differently from the royal psalmist himself, that model of all true prayer, recognized as such by God and the Church? Yet he, when he would enkindle the sacred flame within his breast, has recourse to his harp: 'My heart is ready,' he says; 'Oh God, my heart is ready,' I will sing, I will give forth a psalm. Arise, my glory! arise, psaltery and harp! I will arise in the morning early. I will praise Thee, Oh Lord, among the people; and I will sing unto Thee among the nations. For Thy mercy is great above the heavens, and Thy truth even unto the clouds.' At other times, if, in the interior recollection of the senses, he have entered into the powers of the Lord, then, in his meditation, a fire flames out, a fire of holy excitement; and, to assuage the heat which is burning within him, he bursts out into another canticle, saying: 'My heart hath uttered a good word; I speak my works to the King'; and publishes again and again the beauty and victories of the Bridegroom, and the graces of the bride. So true is it, that for contemplative souls liturgical prayer is both the principle and the consequence of the visits they receive from God.

But in nothing is the excellency of the liturgy so apparent, as in its being milk for children, and solid food for the strong; thus resembling the miraculous bread of the desert, and taking every kind of taste according to the different dispositions of those who eat. It is, indeed, a divine property, which has not unfrequently been noticed even by those who are not of the true fold, and has forced them to acknowledge that the Catholic Church alone knows the secret of prayer.

Nay, might it not be said that the reason that the Protestants have no ascetic writers, is that they have no real liturgical prayer? It is true that a sufficient explanation of the absolute want of unction, which characterizes all that the reformation has produced, is to be found in its denying the holy Sacrament of the Eucharist, which is the centre of all religion: but this is virtually the same as saying that Protestants have no liturgical prayer, inasmuch as the liturgy is so essentially and intimately connected with the Eucharist. So true is this, that wheresoever the dogma of the real Presence has ceased to be believed, there also have the canonical Hours ceased, and could not but cease.

It is therefore Jesus Christ Himself who is the source as well as the object of the liturgy; and hence the ecclesiastical year, which we have undertaken to explain in this work, is neither more nor less than the manifestation of Jesus Christ and His mysteries, in the Church and in the faithful soul. It is the divine cycle, in which appear all the works of God; each in its turn: the seven days of the creation; the Pasch and Pentecost of the Jewish people; the ineffable visit of the Incarnate Word; His sacrifice and His victory; the descent of the Holy Ghost; the holy Eucharist; the surpassing glories of the Mother of God, ever a Virgin; the magnificence of the angels; the merits and triumphs of the saints. Thus the cycle of the Church may be said to have its beginning under the patriarchal Law, its progress under the written Law, and its completion under the Law of love, in which, at length, having attained its last perfection, it will disappear in eternity, as the written Law gave way the day on which the invincible power of the Blood of the Lamb rent asunder the veil of the temple.

Would that we might worthily describe the sacred wonders of this mystical calendar, of which all others are but images and humble auxiliaries! Happy indeed should we deem ourselves, if we could make the faithful understand the grand glory which is given to the blessed Trinity, to our Saviour, to Mary, to the angels, and to the saints, by this annual commemoration of the wondrous works of our God! If, every year, the Church renews her youth as that of the eagle, she does so because, by means of the cycle of the liturgy, she is visited by her divine Spouse, who supplies all her wants. Each year she again sees Him an Infant in the manger, fasting in the desert, offering Himself on the cross, rising from the grave, founding His Church, instituting the Sacraments, ascending to the right hand of His Father, and sending the Holy Ghost upon men. The graces of all these divine mysteries are renewed in her; so that, being made fruitful in every- good thing, the mystic garden yields to the Spouse, in every season, under the influence of the Spirit He breathes into her, the sweet perfume of aromatic spices. Each year the Spirit of God retakes possession of His well-beloved and gives her light and love; each year she derives an increase of life from the maternal influence which the blessed Virgin exercises over her, on the feasts of her joys, her dolours, and her glories; and lastly, the brilliant constellation formed by the successive appearance of the nine choirs of the angels, and of the saints in their varied orders of apostles, martyrs, confessors, and virgins, sheds on her, each year, powerful help and abundant consolation.

The Care of Souls

Now, what the liturgical year does for the Church at large, it does also for the soul of each one of the faithful that is careful to receive the gift of God. This succession of mystic seasons imparts to the Christian the elements of that supernatural life, without which every other life is but a sort of death, more or less disguised. Nay, there are some souls, so far acted upon by the divine succession of the Catholic cycle, that they experience even a physical effect from each

evolution: the supernatural life has gained ascendancy over the natural, and the calendar of the Church makes them forget that of astronomers.

Let the Catholic who reads this work be on his guard against that coldness of faith, and that want of love, which have well-nigh turned into an object of indifference that admirable cycle of the Church, which heretofore was, and always ought to be, the joy of the people, the source of light to the learned, and the book of the humblest of the faithful.

The reader will rightly infer, from what we have said, that the object we have in view is not, in any way, to publish some favourite or clever method of our own with regard to the mysteries of the ecclesiastical year, nor to make them subjects for eloquence, philosophy, or intellectual fancy. We have but one aim, and we humbly ask of God that we may attain it; it is to serve as interpreter to the Church, in order thus to enable the faithful to follow her in her prayer of each mystic season, nay, of each day and hour. God forbid that we should ever presume to put our human thoughts side by side with those which our Lord Jesus Christ, who is the Wisdom of God, dictates by the Holy Ghost to His well-beloved bride the Church! All that we would do is to show what is the spirit which the Holy Ghost has put into each of the several periods of the liturgical year; and for this purpose, to study attentively the most ancient and venerable liturgies, and embody in our explanation the sentiments of the holy fathers and the oldest and most approved liturgists. With these helps, we hope to give to the faithful the flowers of ecclesiastical prayer, and thus unite, as far as possible, practical usefulness with the charm of variety.

In this work we shall lay great stress on the cultus of the saints, inasmuch as it is always needed, but now more than ever. Devotion to the adorable Person of our Saviour has revived amongst us with a vigorous development; devotion to our blessed Lady has wonderfully spread and increased; let the saints also receive our honour and our confidence, and then the last traces of the unhappy spirit introduced by Jansenism will disappear. But, since we cannot introduce all the saints into our calendar, we shall limit ourselves, almost exclusively, to those inserted in that of Rome.

Nevertheless, the Roman liturgy is not the only one we intend to give; though of course it will be the most prominent, as being the very basis of our 'Liturgical Year: The Ambrosian, the Gallican, the Gothic or Mozarabic, the Greek, the Armenian, the Syriac liturgies will, each in its turn, give us of their riches and form our treasury of prayers; and thus, never will the voice of the Church have been fuller and more impressive. The western Churches, during the middle ages, have inserted into the liturgy of some of the feasts Sequences so admirable for their unction and doctrine, that we shall consider it a duty to give them to the faithful as often as occasion serves.

The plan we shall follow in the several volumes of this 'Liturgical Year' will depend upon the subjects which must be treated of in each. Everything that relates to the merely scientific bearing of the liturgy, will be reserved for our 'Liturgical Institutions.' The present work will be limited to those details, which the faithful must necessarily understand in order to enter into the spirit of the Church during the several mystic seasons of the year. The sacred formulae will be explained and adapted to the use of the laity by means of a commentary, in which we shall endeavour to avoid both the imprudence of a literal translation, and the dullness of a tedious and insipid paraphrase.

Since, as we have already said, our aim is to present to the faithful the most solid and useful portions of the liturgies, we have excluded from our selection all such as seemed to us not to answer our purpose. This observation refers mainly to the portions selected from the Offices of the Greek Church. Nothing is finer and more impressive than this liturgy, when read in chosen extracts; but nothing is so disappointing when taken as a whole. The monotony of phrases is insupportable, and the endless repetitions of the same idea spoil the real unction contained in it. We have therefore selected only the richest flowers of this over-stocked garden: more than these would have been a burden. These remarks apply especially to the *Menoëa* and *Anthologia* of the Greek Church. The liturgical books of the other eastern Churches are generally drawn up with better taste and more discretion.

In order to conform with the wishes of the holy See, we do not give, in any of the volumes of our 'Liturgical Year,' the literal translation of the Ordinary and Canon of the Mass; we have in its place endeavoured to give, to such of the laity as do not understand Latin, the means of uniting in the closest possible manner with everything that the priest says and does at the altar.

The first part of the 'Liturgical Year' is devoted to Advent. The second contains the explanation of the divine service from Christmas to the Purification. The third takes us from the Purification as far as Lent, and is called 'Septuagesima.' The fourth comprises the four first weeks of Lent. The fifth consists of Passion week and Holy Week. The sixth includes the time of Easter. The seventh will explain the Office of the Church from the feast of the most Holy Trinity to the end of the time after Pentecost.

An Untiring Affirmation of the Works of God

The year thus planned for us by the Church herself produces a drama the most sublime that has ever been offered to the admiration of man. God intervening for the salvation and sanctification of men; the reconciliation of justice with mercy; the humiliations, the sufferings, and the glories of the God-Man; the coming of the Holy Ghost, and His workings in humanity and in the faithful soul; the mission and the action of the Church—all are there portrayed in the most telling and impressive way. Each mystery has its time and place by means of the sublime succession of the respective anniversaries. A divine fact happened nineteen hundred years ago; its anniversary is kept in the liturgy, and its impression is thus reiterated every year in the minds of the faithful, with a freshness, as though God were then doing for the first time what He did so many ages past. Human ingenuity could never have devised a system of such power as this. And those writers who are bold and frivolous enough to assert that Christianity has no longer an influence in the world, and is now but the ruin of an ancient thing - what would they say at seeing these undying realities, this vigour, this endlessness of the liturgical year?

For what is the liturgy, but an untiring affirmation of the works of God? a solemn acknowledgement of those divine facts, which, though done but once, are imperishable in man's remembrance, and are every year renewed by the commemoration he makes of them? Have we not our writings of the apostolic age, our acts of the martyrs, our decrees of ancient Councils, our writings of the fathers, our monuments, taking us to the very origin of Christianity, and testifying to the most explicit tradition regarding our feasts? It is true that the liturgical cycle has its integrity and its development nowhere but in the Catholic Church; but the sects which are separated from her, whether by schism or by heresy, all pay the homage of their testimony to the divine origin of the liturgy by the pertinacity with which they cling to the remnants they have preserved - remnants, by the way, to which they owe whatever vitality they still retain.

But though the liturgy so deeply impresses us by annually bringing before us the dramatic solemnization of those mysteries which have been accomplished for the salvation of man and for his union with his God, it is nevertheless wonderful how the succession of year after year diminishes not one atom of the freshness and vehemence of those impressions, and each new beginning of the cycle of mystic seasons seems to be our first year. Advent is ever impregnated with the spirit of a sweet and mysterious expectation. Christmas ever charms us with the incomparable joy of the birth of the divine Child. We enter, with the well-known feeling, into the gloom of Septuagesima. Lent comes, and we prostrate ourselves before God's justice, and our heart is filled with a salutary fear and compunction, which seem so much keener than they were the year before. The Passion of our Redeemer, followed in every minutest detail does it not seem as though we never knew it till this year? The pageant of Easter makes us so glad, that our former Easters appear to have been only half kept. The triumphant Ascension discloses to us upon the whole economy of the Incarnation, secrets which we never knew before this year. When the Holy Ghost comes down at Pentecost, is it not the case that we so thrill with the renewal of the great Presence that our emotions of last Whit Sunday seem too tame for this?

However habituated we get to the ineffable gift which Jesus made us on the eve of His Passion, the bright dear feast of Corpus Christi brings a strange increase of love to our heart; and the blessed Sacrament seems more our own than ever. The feasts of our blessed Lady come round, each time revealing something more of her greatness; and the saints-with whom we fancied we had become so thoroughly acquainted - each year as they visit us, seem so much grander, we understand them better, we feel more sensibly the link there is between them and ourselves.

This renovative power of the liturgical year, to which we wish to draw the attention of our readers, is a mystery of the Holy Ghost, who unceasingly animates the work which He has inspired the Church to establish among men; that thus they might sanctify that time which has been given to them for the worship of their Creator. The renovation works also a twofold growth in the mind of man: the increase of knowledge of the truths of faith, and the development of the supernatural life. There is not a single point of Christian doctrine which, in the course of the liturgical year, is not brought forward, nay, is not inculcated with that authority and unction wherewith our holy mother the Church has so deeply impregnated her words and her eloquent rites. The faith of the believer is thus enlightened more and more each year; the theological *sensus* is formed in him; prayer leads him to science. Mysteries continue to be mysteries; but their brightness becomes so vivid, that the mind and heart are enchanted, and we begin to imagine what a joy the eternal sight of these divine beauties will produce in us, when the glimpse of them through the clouds is such a charm to us.

Yes, there must needs be a great progress in a Christian soul, when the object of her faith is ever gaining greater light; when the hope of her salvation is almost forced upon her by the sight of all those wonders which God's goodness has wrought for His creatures; and when charity is enkindled within her under the breath of the Holy Ghost, who has made the liturgy to be the centre of His working in men's souls. Is not the formation of Christ within us the result of our uniting in His various mysteries, the joyful, the sorrowful, and the glorious? These mysteries of Jesus come into us, are incorporated into us each year, by the power of the special grace which the liturgy produces by communicating them to us: the new man gradually grows up, even on the ruins of the old. Then again, in order that the divine type may the more easily be stamped upon us, we need examples; we want to see how our fellow-men have realized that type in themselves: and the liturgy fulfils this need for us, by offering us the practical teaching and the

encouragement of our dear saints, who shine like stars in the firmament of the ecclesiastical year.

By looking upon them we come to learn the way which leads to Jesus, just as Jesus is our Way which leads to the Father. But above all the saints, and brighter than them all, we have Mary, showing us, in her single person, the Mirror of Justice in which is reflected all the sanctity possible in a pure creature.

Finally, the 'Liturgical Year,' the plan of which we have been explaining, will bring continually before us the most sublime poetry that the human mind has conceived. Not only will it enable us to understand the divine songs of David and the prophets, on which mainly the liturgy has formed her own; but the cycle will elicit from the Church, according as the different seasons and feasts come round, canticles and hymns the finest, the sublimest, and the worthiest of the subject. We shall hear the several countries, united as they are in one common faith, pouring forth their admiration and love in accents, wherein are blended the most perfect harmony of thought and sentiment with the most marked diversity of genius and expression. We exclude from our collection, as duty requires we should, certain modern compositions which had too close a resemblance to pagan literature, and which, as they had not received the sanction of the Church's acceptance, were likely to be short-lived: but the productions of liturgical genius, no matter of what age in the Church, are profusely admitted; from Sedulius and Prudentius, down to Adam of Saint Victor and his contemporaries, for the Latin Church; and from Saint Ephrem, down to the latest Catholic Byzantine hymnologists, for the Greek Church. A rich vein of poetry will be found as well in the prayers which have been composed in simple prose, as in those which are presented to us in the garb of measure and rhythm. Poetry, being the only language adequate to the sublime thought which is to be expressed, is to be found everywhere in the liturgy, as it is in the inspired writings; and a complete collection of the formulae of public prayer would be, at the same time, the richest selection of Christian poetry, of that poetry which sings on earth the mysteries of heaven and prepares us for the canticles of eternity.

In concluding this General Preface, we beg to remind our readers, that in a work like the present, the success of the writer is absolutely dependent upon the Holy Spirit, who breathes where He wills and that the most which man can do is to plant and water. We venture therefore to ask the children of the Church, who desire to see her prayer loved and used above all others, to aid us by recommending our work to God, that so our unworthiness may not be an obstacle to what we have undertaken, and which we feel to be so much above our strength. We have only to add that we submit our work, both in its substance and its form, to the sovereign and infallible judgement of the holy Roman Church, which alone is the guardian both of the words of eternal life, and of the secret of prayer.