**The Theology of a Single Word**

**Rev. Peter J. Pacini, C.S.C.**

If you listen carefully as the Opening Prayers are said at Mass, you will notice a very subtle change in wording. In our English Missals, all of these so-called “Collect” prayers, which conclude the opening rites, end with a familiar Trinitarian doxology, which many people could probably recite by heart: “Through our Lord Jesus Christ, your Son, who lives and reigns with you, in the unity of the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever.” However, a correction was recently issued by the Holy See, directing us to omit *a single word*. Instead of “**one God**, for ever and ever,” we are to say simply, “**God**, for ever and ever.” You might ask, “What’s the difference? Don’t those mean the same thing?” Actually, no, they don’t.

The Collect prayers, like most of the prayers of the Mass, are directed *to* God the Father *through* God the Son. While the Prayers over the Gifts and the Prayers after Communion end with a simple phrase, “through Christ our Lord,” the Collect prayers include three additional clauses. In the official Latin text, *all three clauses refer to Christ*, affirming three distinct theological truths about him:

1. Jesus Christ is Son of God the Father;
2. Jesus Christ lives and reigns with the Father, in the unity of the Holy Spirit;
3. *Jesus Christ is God*, for ever and ever.

The final clause, then, is supposed to affirm Christ’s divinity and his everlasting divine nature. However, that meaning has been obscured by a mistranslation. The official Latin text contains the word “Deus” (God), without any modifier to indicate “*one* God.” When the word “one” is inserted in English to modify the word “God,” then the clause takes on a different meaning and a *different subject*. It appears to refer to the *Holy Trinity*, not to Christ alone. Instead of affirming that *Christ is God*, it now affirms that the three divine Persons mentioned in the previous clause are *one God*. Granted, these are both divinely revealed truths. But, they are not the *same* truth. An error in translation has inadvertently substituted one Catholic dogma for another.

 During my many years of bilingual ministry, I had noticed a difference between the English and Spanish texts of the Collect prayers. The Spanish version matched the Latin text, ending with, “*Dios*, por los siglos de los siglos” (*God*, for ever and ever), as opposed to, “*un sólo Dios*, por los siglos de los siglos” (*one God*, for ever and ever). Even after both the English and Spanish Missals were re-translated in recent years, the discrepancy remained. Ever since the first English Missals were published in 1970, they have *always* given the false impression that the last line of the Collect prayers was supposed to refer to the Holy Trinity, not to Christ. Finally, that mistake is being rectified.

 Now, all of us priests need to get used to saying the Collect prayers without the word “one,” and all the faithful need to get used to hearing them said that way. Hopefully, the novelty of our new, corrected translation will help all of us to focus more intently on what these prayers proclaim about Jesus Christ and his divinity:

* He is Son of God the Father;
* He lives and reigns with the Father, in the unity of the Holy Spirit; and,
* ***He is God***, for ever and ever.