REVISED ROMAN MISSAL

"Consubstantial with the Father"

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One of the more interesting changes in the revised translation of *The Roman Missal* occurs in the Creed, where a word that few would use conversationally occurs. In the second paragraph of the Creed, the phrase "consubstantial with the Father" will replace "one in Being with the Father." Some may wonder why such an unfamiliar word needs to be used. On the other hand, it may just as easily be asked, whether we understand the phrase, "one in Being with the Father"? Both options attempt to put into words one of the great mysteries of our faith, that Jesus Christ is equal to the Father. The use of the term "consubstantial" has been carefully considered before being chosen. Admittedly, the term carries some complexities with it. But the Congregation for Divine Worship and the Discipline of the Sacraments recommended its use with good reason. Let's look at the word more closely.

The Nicene Creed originally was composed in Greek; the Greek word used in the phrase is *homoousios*. This is a compound formed from two words: *homo* (same) and *ousia* (essence, being). The use of this word in the Creed was revolutionary in its day because it is not a scriptural but a philosophical term. The greatest heresy of that day, Arianism, argued the Christ was not of the same substance of the Father, but only of a *similar* substance (*homoiousios*) and, therefore, was not equal to the Father. The Church Fathers wanted to be precise in the language used for such a great mystery, and the debates at the time were long and often acrimonious. From the very beginning, the Latin Creed translated this Greek word as *consubstantialem*, for similar precise philosophical and theological reasons. By breaking down the word con-sub-stantial, we can understand it a little better.

The root word "substance" (*sub*=under; *stans*=standing) is also a technical, philosophical term that refers to the most real part of a being. Literally, it refers to that which "stands under," the base of a person or thing, that which is at the heart of someone or something. This is fine as long as we don't equate substance with the mere physical or external dimension. Today, we can use the word substance in reference to the essential, for example, "the substance of the matter," but we can also use it in a rather mundane and materialistic sense, for example, "help me wash this grimy substance off my hands!" Within the liturgy, of course, the Church is thinking of the former. In the Eucharist, for example, we say that bread and wine are trans*substantiated* into the Body and Blood, Soul and Divinity of Jesus Christ. The form or appearance of the bread and wine remain the same, but their inner substance, the reality *underneath* the appearance, is changed. This is why we don't say the bread and wine are just trans*formed*, but trans*substantiated*.

The other part of *consubstantial* is the first three letters "con"—profound yet beautiful in its simplicity. It comes from the Latin preposition *cum* meaning "together with." In the Creed, consubstantial means that Christ was of one substance with the Father, but it also implies one substance with our humanity. He is co-substantial, referring therein to the two natures of Christ—human and divine.

The previous translation "one in Being" does not portray this multivalence. Also, most would assert that this phrase is not as precise. The English word "Being" has a broader meaning than the philosophical term "substance." "Being" commonly refers to all that is, which would include the appearance or form of a thing, and in relation to the holy Trinity, could mistakenly include *Person*hood. God the Son is not the same *Person* as God the Father, but they do share the same *inner* being, or the same *substance*. Both phrases, "one in Being" and "consubstantial," are accurate when properly understood. In translating the Creed, however, it is important to be as precise as possible, and the Church believes strongly that the term "consubstantial" is a better choice in naming the Great Mystery that is the relationship of Jesus Christ to God the Father and to us, his adopted sons and daughters.