

The New Translation of the Holy Mass: "And with Your Spirit"

by Brian W. MacMichael

Last week, we looked at the newly translated opening prayer for Mass on the First Sunday of Advent, which we will start using as part of the revised Roman Missal in a year. Again, right now is a great time to learn about the new English translation of the Mass, because Advent is a liturgical season meant for preparing ourselves to welcome Jesus Christ. And since Christ is especially present to us in the holy sacrifice of the Mass, the words we use during worship are extremely important.

This week, we begin looking at the "Order of Mass" - that is, those parts of the Mass that we pray every week, with only slight variations. For instance, the priest always begins Mass by saying, "In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit." We respond, "Amen." By the way, these familiar words will not change with the new Missal!

Immediately after the Sign of the Cross, the celebrant extends one of three different liturgical greetings to the people, the most common of which is simply, "The Lord be with you." That, too, will remain the same. However, our new response will be the first major change in the Order of Mass. Instead of "And also with you," we will now be saying, "**And with your spirit.**" This new response will also be made at the four other times during Mass when this dialogue occurs: at the reading of the Gospel, at the beginning of the Eucharistic Prayer, during the Our Father, and at the conclusion of Mass.

Why the change? At the most basic level, "and with your spirit" is the proper translation of the original Latin text: "*Et cum spiritu tuo.*" By correctly expressing this dialogue in English, we are actually aligning our translation with that of all the other major language groups, which have long been translating the Latin properly. For example, in Spanish, the response is "*Y con tu espíritu.*"

There is an oft-told story of how Venerable Pope John Paul II initiated this new English translation. John Paul II was renowned as a world traveler, and he was also a very accomplished linguist, fluent in eight languages. During his trips abroad, he prayed from many different translations of the Roman Missal, and he began to notice discrepancies. So, he examined multiple books side by side - such texts as the Latin, Italian, German, French, Polish, and English. What he discovered was that our existing English translation was in need of considerable improvement. It is likely that the Holy Father's attention was particularly drawn to the fact that the English did not say, "And with your spirit."

But even beyond the linguistic, the recovery of the word "spirit" also carries Scriptural meaning. One form or other of "The Lord be with you" appears multiple times in the Bible, including the greeting given by the Archangel Gabriel to Mary at the Annunciation: "Hail, favored one! The Lord is with you" (Lk 1:28). Then, in the Pauline epistles, multiple variations of "The Lord be with your spirit" are employed as parting words to different church communities. Understood together, this liturgical dialogue in the Mass is an exchange whereby all present - both priest and congregation - ask that the Holy Spirit (whom we call "the Lord, the giver of life" in the Nicene Creed) establish a stronger communion among us.

In addition, for the congregation to answer the priest, "And with your spirit," is actually a theological statement about what we Catholics believe regarding ordained ministers. The *Catechism* (#367) speaks of how "spirit" can refer to an elevation of the soul, whereby the soul "is raised beyond all it deserves to communion with God." Through Holy Orders, Christ has forever configured the priest's soul to Himself in a special way, by the power of the Holy Spirit. By specifically referencing the priest's spirit, we can affirm this transformation and pray for his ministry.

This new response of "And with your spirit" will be a difficult change to remember - perhaps one of the most difficult for us laity. Although it is a seemingly minor adjustment, our current response has become second nature to us. However, it will not take long to grow accustomed to the new wording, especially given its frequency. Above all, we should reflect on how it conveys the content of Sacred Scripture, as well as the work of the Holy Spirit in the Church.