

Preparing the Way for the Roman Missal

Where the New Translation meets the New Evangelization™

‘And with your spirit’

When the *Roman Missal – Third Edition* in English is officially implemented, we won’t have to wait very long to encounter the first change in the text:

Priest: The Lord be with you.

People: *And with your spirit.*

This dialogue (and others like it) takes place no less than five times in the celebration of Holy Mass, beginning with the Introductory Rite.

You mean the greeting?

No! As you’re about to discover, this ancient and venerable liturgical exchange (documented as far back as the year 215 A.D.) is much more than just an ordinary “greeting.”

In his “Homily on the Holy Pentecost” which dates to the end of the fourth century, St. John Chrysostom, Doctor of the Church, taught:

If the Holy Spirit were not in [the priest] when he gave the peace to all shortly before ascending to his holy sanctuary, you would not have replied to him all together, ***And with your spirit.***

This is why you reply with this expression not only when he ascends to the sanctuary, nor when he preaches to you, nor when he prays for you, but when he stands at this holy altar, when he is about to offer this awesome Sacrifice:

You don’t first partake of the offerings until he *has prayed for you the grace from the Lord*, and you have answered him, ***And with your spirit***, reminding yourselves by this reply that he who is here does nothing of his own power, nor are the offered gifts the work of human nature, but is it the grace of the Spirit present and hovering over all things which prepared that mystic sacrifice.

- Saint John Chrysostom

Blessing and profession

St. John Chrysostom is telling us that when the priest who celebrates Holy Mass says, *The Lord be with you*, he is “praying for you the grace from the Lord;” i.e. he is *blessing* us in preparation for the Divine action into which we are invited.

Furthermore, St. John lets us know that when we respond, *And with your spirit*, we’re not merely reciprocating with our own expression of kindness; rather, we are primarily making a very timely and profound *profession of faith*.

You see, we are acknowledging that the priest who stands before us does so as one who is uniquely configured to Christ, present to serve at Holy Mass *in Persona Christi* - in the Person of Christ – and most certainly not by his own resources.

We are affirming our confidence in the Sacrament of Holy Orders and the mark that is born on the soul of the ordained, for it is by this presence of Christ in the inmost being (or “spirit”) of the priest that the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass is thus possible.

In one sense, we might think of our response as a tangible example of what St. John the Baptist said of himself; *the priest must decrease so that the Lord Jesus Christ, the one true High Priest, might increase.*

Not the typical form of blessing

I think it’s readily apparent that *The Lord be with you* is not the typical manner of blessing, even within the context of the Mass; e.g., the priest blesses the people with the far more familiar formula, “May Almighty God Bless you, Father, Son and Holy Spirit,” during the Concluding Rite.

One is left to wonder, therefore, why the priest blesses the assembled faithful with such words as *The Lord be with you* and *The peace of the Lord be with you always* at various times throughout the sacred liturgy? What, we may ask, makes *this* blessing so unique?

A liturgical blessing

When the priest says, *The Lord be with you*, he is speaking in a particular way to *the Baptized*, to strengthen and encourage them as they prepare to enter ever more deeply into the Sacred Mysteries.

As the Catechism tells us, “It is through Baptism that the laity are enabled to celebrate the liturgy through their participation, while those who have received Holy Orders nourish the Church with the word and grace of God in the name of Christ” (cf CCC 1119).

The priest is speaking, in other words, to those who through Baptism share in the *common priesthood* of the faithful; those who are thereby called at Holy Mass to “offer the Immaculate Victim, not only through the hands of the priest, but also with him, as well as themselves; through Christ the Mediator” (cf SC 48).

This being the case, we should realize that St. John the Baptist’s words, “The Lord must increase, but I must decrease,” (John 3:30) apply every bit as much to the faithful at Holy Mass as they do to the priest. Why? Because it is only through the operative presence of Christ within each of us – whatever our particular vocation or state in life may be – that we are able to co-operate with Him and thus to participate in the sacred rite.

Through, with and in Christ

At the sound of the words *The Lord be with you*, we must seek to join ourselves to the presence of the Lord in a “fully conscious” way, because it is only *through Him, with Him and in Him* that “active participation” in Holy Mass is truly possible.

The sacred liturgy is an action of Christ that “above all things, is the worship of the Divine Majesty” (SC 33). Pope Pius XII wrote of how the faithful, by the power of the Spirit, may enter into this act of Divine worship offered by the Son to the Father:

The chief element of divine worship must be interior. For we must always live in Christ and give ourselves to Him completely, so that in Him, with Him and through Him the heavenly Father may be duly glorified.

Pope Pius XII - *Mediator Dei* - 24

Joining oneself to the Lord at Holy Mass

The Council Fathers tell us that Christ is present in the Mass in four distinct ways: “most especially” in the Holy Eucharist, but also in Sacred Scripture, in the people assembled, and in the person of the ordained minister (cf SC 7).

To unite oneself to Christ in the Most Holy Eucharist, ideally speaking, entails receiving Him in Holy Communion while properly disposed in a state of grace.

To join oneself to Christ in His Holy Word, we must listen attentively for the voice of the Good Shepherd calling out to us *personally* in the readings, “since it is He Himself who speaks when the Holy Scriptures are read in the Church” (SC 7).

When we consider the Lord’s presence in the assembly and in the ordained minister, however, it is here that the deeper meaning of our liturgical exchange comes into sharper focus.

The Lord be with you

When these words are spoken, our attention is first drawn *inward* to “be with” the presence of Christ as Baptism is the gateway to participation at Mass.

Turning to the presence of the Lord within, however, is not enough. We are also compelled to seek intimate union with the High Priest who is made present to us in a unique way *in the person of the ordained minister*, so that “together with Him, and through Him we may offer the Sacrifice, making ourselves one with Him” (cf *Mediator Dei*).

And with your spirit

By this response, we are affirming in essence, “Yes, Father, I shall heed He who dwells within you by virtue of Holy Orders; blessing me through your hands, and so I unite myself to the Lord within my own inmost being ‘and with *your spirit*’ as well.”

In another sense, we may also consider our response to be a kind of prayer *for* the ordained minister who stands before us; that he may be strengthened by grace, in faith, so as to yield entirely to Christ to whom he is configured; He who alone can ascend to the altar of the Lord as both High Priest and Sacrifice.

All glory, praise and honor to Almighty God!