

Transitioning to the new Roman Missal

Part 10 in a series (Prepared for St. James Cathedral, Seattle by Corinna Laughlin)

November 13, 2011

Following the Eucharistic Prayer, the Communion Rite begins. This part of the liturgy includes a number of prayers of preparation. There are prayers for the entire assembly, private prayers for the priest, and rites to prepare for the communion of the assembly.

We prepare for communion as a community by praying the Lord's Prayer and exchanging a sign of

peace. Then the Body of Christ is broken and divided into patens or bowls during the Agnus Dei, the Lamb of God. Then, bowing before the consecrated elements, the priest prays silently one of two early medieval prayers of preparation for communion. Only after this prayer does the priest elevate the host and chalice once again, and invite the people to come forward with an invitation based on the Scriptures.

The first part of this invitation, which takes up the words of the Agnus Dei we have just sung, comes from words of John the Baptist in John 1:29: "Behold the Lamb of God, who takes away the sins of the world." The second part comes from the vision of the heavenly liturgy in the book of Revelation 19:9: "Then the angel said to me, 'Write this: Blessed are those who have been called to the wedding feast of the Lamb.' And he said to me, 'These words are true; they come from God.'" In the Eucharist we celebrate, we join, for a moment, in the heavenly liturgy. In the sacrament we are about to receive, we have a pledge of eternal glory, a foretaste of the heavenly banquet.

Our response is also based on the Scriptures. It is based on the Gospel account of the healing of the servant of a Roman centurion, which appears both in Matthew and in Luke. "Lord, I am not worthy to have you enter

INVITATION TO COMMUNION

Priest:

Behold the Lamb of God,
behold him who takes away the sins of the world.
Blessed are those called to the supper of the Lamb.

Priest and People:

**Lord, I am not worthy
that you should enter under my roof,
but only say the word
and my soul shall be healed.**

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under my roof; only say the word and my servant shall be healed" (Matthew 8:8). The new translation of the response more accurately reflects the Latin text, and also more obviously echoes the Gospel passage, particularly the phrase "under my roof."

Why do we recall this particular Gospel passage just before receiving communion? Perhaps because the response of the centurion combines an expression of humility with an amazing

act of faith. He believes so completely in Jesus' healing power that he is confident that just a word from Jesus will do. His faith is what Jesus remarks on: "in no one in Israel have I found such faith," and looks forward to a time when "many will come from the east and the west, and will recline with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob at the banquet in the kingdom of heaven" (8:11).

It is interesting to compare our response to those in other Christian traditions at this moment. In many Eastern Rite churches, the priest invites the people to communion with the words "Holy things for holy people," and the response is an acclamation of praise: "One Holy, one Lord, Jesus Christ to the glory of God the Father." In the Episcopal Church, a prayer before communion recalls a different Gospel story: "We are not worthy so much as to gather up the crumbs under thy Table." Then the priest says, "The Gifts of God for the People of God." Humble awareness of our unworthiness and faith in Christ's saving power, joy in this moment and hope for the heavenly banquet—all these themes intertwine at this holy moment.

THE LANGUAGE OF THE MASS IS CHANGING We will begin using the new translation of the Roman Missal on Sunday, November 27. AFTER ALL MASSES THIS WEEKEND, IN THE PASTORAL OUTREACH CENTER, there will be a gathering to hear and practice the new responses, to ask questions and share your thoughts. Please attend one of these sessions.