

Transitioning to the new Roman Missal

Part 2 in a series (Prepared for St. James Cathedral, Seattle by Corinna Laughlin)

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At four important moments during the Mass – during the Introductory Rites, before the Gospel, at the beginning of the Eucharistic Prayer, and just before the Blessing and Dismissal – priest and people exchange this greeting, which speaks of God’s presence in the midst of the liturgical assembly. Like so much of our prayer, the greeting and response come straight from the scriptures.

The short form, “The Lord be with you,” occurs several times in the Old Testament. The extended forms are taken almost directly from the words of Saint Paul: “Greet one another with a holy kiss. All the holy ones greet you. The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ and the love of God and the fellowship of the holy Spirit be with all of you” (2 Cor. 13:12-13). This is Paul’s farewell blessing to the Corinthians, a community with faith, but also with its share of challenges and conflicts - in other words, a community not unlike our own. His prayer for them is that they may be united, in the grace, love, and fellowship of God.

In the new translation, we will respond to this prayer for God’s presence in our midst, with the words, “And with your spirit.” These words also come to us from Saint Paul, who used the phrase several times. The letter to the Galatians, for example, concludes, “The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with your spirit” (6:18), and similar words are used in Philippians, Philemon, and 2 Timothy.

Why “spirit”? In Latin, this response reads “Et cum spiritu tuo.” The translators of the 1974 Sacramentary chose to translate this as “And also with you” because of concerns that the use of the word “spirit” could be confusing for modern-day Catholics. The simple word “you” embraces the whole person: body, mind, and spirit.

The new translation uses the words “and with your spirit,” an exact rendering of the Latin. Some commentators have argued for the importance of this change, suggesting that these words (used only in dialogues with a deacon or priest) refer to the special gifts of the Holy Spirit the minister received at ordination. This explanation reaches back to some of the



Text from a 14th-century Roman Missal from Bohemia (present day Czechoslovakia). The lighter text is red in the original, indicating rubrics describing ritual action.

Fathers of the Church, and yet, that was clearly not what St. Paul had in mind when he addressed the same words to the people of Galatia. An ancient homily for the Easter Vigil echoes this liturgical dialogue in yet another way. The homily imagines Christ’s descent to the dead: “The Lord goes in holding his victorious weapon, his cross. When Adam, the first created man, sees him, he strikes his breast in terror and calls out to all: ‘My Lord be with you all.’ And Christ in reply says to Adam: ‘And with your spirit.’ And grasping his hand he raises him up.”

“The Lord be with you.” “And with your spirit.” In essence, the priest and the people say the same thing to each other: we pray for God’s presence as we begin an important action in the liturgy. In many ways, this dialogue is like others in which we see the parallelism characteristic of Hebrew prayer. In the Liturgy of the Hours, we pray, “God, come to my assistance.” “Lord, make haste to help me.” And, in the Mass, the familiar response to the Prayer of the Faithful uses a similar rhetorical pattern: “We pray to the Lord.” “Lord, hear our prayer.”

THE GREETING

The Lord be with you.
And with your spirit.

or,

Grace to you and peace
from God our Father
and the Lord Jesus Christ.
And with your spirit.

or,

The grace of
our Lord Jesus Christ,
and the love of God,
and the communion
of the Holy Spirit be with you all.
And with your spirit.

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