

## 18<sup>th</sup> SUNDAY OF ORDINARY TIME – A (July 31, 2011)

The more we hear these gospel accounts of Jesus multiplying a few loaves of bread and a couple of fish into enough to feed thousands (with twelve baskets of leftovers to boot), the more we are led to see this miracle as a foretaste, a prelude to the great gift and miracle of the Eucharist. Jesus was always seeing to the physical and bodily needs of his followers (e.g. in feeding the hungry and curing the sick), but even more was he concerned to satisfy our spiritual hunger. And in the Eucharist, Jesus does that in the most amazingly intimate way imaginable: by giving us his very Body and Blood. No wonder the Church continues to refer to the Eucharist as the source and summit of our Catholic faith and life: since it is Christ our Savior himself who gives us himself in this mysterious yet very real and tangible way.

Because the Eucharist is so central to our faith, the Church—to whom Jesus has entrusted the Eucharist and the other sacraments—exercises great care and attention to its proper and reverent celebration. That care is an important and ongoing responsibility of the Church. That is precisely why the Church, after much prayer, study and discussion, has provided us with the new English translation of some parts of the Mass that we will begin using this coming Advent (in late November).

I have already spoken in general terms about this new Missal and why we have it: to provide a more accurate translation of the official Latin text which reminds us that the Mass is primarily about offering our worship and thankful praise to the God who has redeemed us in Jesus his Son. Today I want to start a bit more of a detailed treatment of some elements of this new translation that will be especially relevant for you. To introduce today's specific topic, I have a brief story—one you have heard before but I think bears repeating. One Sunday morning the local parish priest, after the opening hymn, began Mass as usual: “In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit”; everyone responded “Amen.” Father then realized the sound system didn't seem to be working, so he said “There's something wrong with this microphone”...to which the people dutifully responded “and also with you!” Ah, the power of ritual....

You are all very familiar with our liturgical ritual: after the sign of the Cross, the priest begins “The Lord be with you” or another such greeting. And over the last 35 years or so, your response of “and also with you” has been repeated by the English-speaking Catholic world countless times in countless Masses and other sacramental celebrations. The problem with that response, however, is that it does not accurately reflect the fullness of the Latin. Those of us old enough to remember the Latin Mass before Vatican II will remember the priest's greeting “Dominus vobiscum” [Dominus—Lord; vobis—you (pl.); cum—with] which literally means “the Lord be with you”. The people's response in Latin is “et cum spiritu tuo”. Back in the 1970's, the English-speaking Church translated that rather loosely as “and also with you.” But the Latin actually says much more than that simple, rather informal response. The more accurate translation, and the one you will begin using in Advent, is actually “and with your spirit.” That word “spirit” is key. Listen again to the Latin: “et cum spiritu tuo” [et—and; cum—with; spiritu—spirit; tuo—your]. “Spiritu”—spirit: the connection is obvious and clear. If you have been reading our bulletin blurbs on the new Missal, you may remember one of the earlier ones saying that English is the only major European language that does not mention the word “spirit” in the current translation (“and also with you”). The new translation “and with your spirit” will correct that mistake.

Now, you may be thinking to yourself at this point: “Gee, thanks for the Latin lesson, Father...but so what? What's the big deal?” Well, it is in fact a big deal. First, that response with its explicit reference to the “Spirit” has been part of the liturgical dialogue between priest and people from the earliest centuries of the Church's life (St. Paul uses very similar language in some of his letters). So we are reconnecting more strongly with our historical roots as a Eucharistic Church and people. But it is not just about history. “And with your spirit” is also a reference and reminder to the priest as to who and what he is—one who, at his ordination to the priesthood, received in a special way the spirit of Christ and which thus

enables him to offer the Mass and do the other things he was ordained to do. So your response will actually be more of a formal prayer. When the priest says “the Lord be with you” which is itself a prayer (not merely a statement of fact), your response “and with your spirit” is also prayer. As one of our U.S. bishops recently said, this response is the people’s prayer “that the Lord be with the priest as he, by his ordination, acts in the person of Christ, exercising the spirit he first received [at his ordination].”

This prayer is also an important reminder to us priests that we are here—we are ordained—not to do our own thing, not to draw attention to ourselves, but instead to allow Christ to work in and through us for your sake as much (if not more than) our own. The Mass is not about me or any other priest; it is first and foremost about Jesus Christ. Just like I said three weeks ago: the Mass is not mainly about us—it is primarily about God and our need to offer him our worship and praise. I have told you before that we priests need and depend on the grace of God and your prayers for us. Otherwise, we would not dare to even think about acting in the person of Christ, let alone speak in that way...frail and sinful creatures that we are. “And with your spirit” expresses your prayer that the spirit of Christ will strengthen us priests to grow in faithfulness and diligence to be and to do what we were ordained to be and do.

One last note about this “the Lord be with you...and with your spirit”: this little dialogue comes us four different times at Mass—at the beginning, before proclaiming the gospel, at the beginning of the Eucharistic prayer (before the “Holy Holy”), and at the final blessing and dismissal. So we will have plenty of opportunities to practice this new response, and there will certainly be plenty more reminders (both oral and written) between now and Advent. The Waterloo parishes will soon be ordering pew cards that will highlight this and the other major changes that will be relevant for you.

Again I urge you: do not worry about this! We will all be in the learning process together, and that can indeed be a bit awkward at times. Besides, the changes in translation are far more numerous for the priest’s prayers than they are for you...so I’m sure I’ll be making far more mistakes at first than you ever will! And if you let slip an occasional “and also with you” instead of “and with your spirit”, I promise you that neither Pope Benedict nor Archbishop Hanus will excommunicate you... We will all need to be diligent about this, of course, but we need to allow ourselves to be patient as well. We will learn much more about these new translations and we (you and I together) will in fact learn them. They will become second nature to us just as our current translations are second nature to us now.

Remember what God said through the prophet Isaiah in our first reading: “I will renew with you the everlasting covenant, the benefits assured to David.” That renewal was accomplished eternally in Jesus Christ, but we as individuals and as Church need to undergo constant renewal in this life. This gift of the new Roman Missal will surely help us grow in the truth and love of the God of Jesus Christ—if we simply open ourselves to the Spirit he wants to pour forth in us.

