

HIGHLIGHTS OF THE NEW ENGLISH MASS TRANSLATION

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PART ONE: THE INTRODUCTORY RITES

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

PEOPLE: And with your Spirit.

“And with your Spirit” is a literal translation of the Latin “*Et cum spiritu tuo.*”

This dialogue between the priest and the people is not a greeting—not another way of saying “Good morning everyone” and “Good morning to you, Father.” The priest, acting in the person of Christ, is offering blessing from Christ; the assembly responds with a profession of faith that the priest’s spirit has indeed been configured to Christ—the one true priest—in a unique way through his ordination, and that it is Jesus Christ himself who will celebrate this Mass through the human instrument we see before us.

So this brief dialogue is not a greeting between the man wearing the vestments and the people in the pews—it is a blessing from Christ himself given through his ordained minister, and our acknowledgment that it is Jesus, not Father Smith, who will offer this Mass.

St. John Chrysostom said of this dialogue back in the fourth century: ***“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 it is the grace of the Spirit present and hovering over all things which prepared this mystic sacrifice.”***

In the blessing spoken by the priest, the 1970’s translation substituted “fellowship” for the “communion” of the Holy Spirit, changing the meaning of this phrase. Fellowship means having something in common—communion means being one with another.

Penitential Act:

In accordance with 1 Corinthians 11:27-29 and James 5:16, we must confess our sinfulness to both God and to each other, and sincerely ask for forgiveness, before we can worthily receive the Eucharist. This is what the Penitential Act is about. While there are a few different forms to choose from, the one with the most obvious differences from our current translation is the Confiteor. The literal translation reads like this:

***I confess to almighty God
and to you, my brothers and sisters,
that I have greatly sinned,
in my thoughts and in my words,
in what I have done and in what I have failed to do,***
[striking our chest we say]:
***through my fault, through my fault,
through my most grievous fault;***
[we then continue]:
***therefore I ask blessed Mary ever-Virgin,
all the Angels and Saints,
and you, my brothers and sisters,
to pray for me to the Lord our God.***

“That I have greatly sinned” includes a translation of the Latin adverb “*nimis*,” which had been previously omitted. We will also use a literal translation of “*mea culpa, mea culpa, mea maxima culpa*,” reading “through my fault, through my fault, through my most grievous fault.” An accurate translation more clearly reinforces the serious nature of sin, and the responsibility we bear for it. Only through our deep repentance can we be filled with the even deeper mercy of God.

(The gentle striking of the chest during the Confiteor has always been called for in the Mass, but we have gotten away from doing it.)

Now that we have confessed our sinfulness and have received God’s mercy, we rejoice with the angels, who together with the saints join us in worship at every Mass:

***Glory to God in the highest,
and on earth peace to people of good will.
We praise you,
we bless you,
we adore you,
we glorify you,
we give you thanks for your great glory.
Lord God, heavenly King,
O God, almighty Father.
Lord Jesus Christ, Only Begotten Son,
Lord God, Lamb of God, Son of the Father,
you take away the sins of the world,
have mercy on us;
you take away the sins of the world,
receive our prayer;
you are seated at the right hand of the Father,
have mercy on us.
For you alone are the Holy One,
you alone are the Lord,
you alone are the Most High,
Jesus Christ,
with the Holy Spirit,
in the glory of God the Father.
Amen.***

The most striking difference we'll notice is that we'll no longer say "peace to his people on earth," but rather "on earth peace to people of good will." This is a more accurate translation of the angels' words in Luke 2:14, which is where we get the beginning of this song of praise.

Much of the Christian world has been influenced by the King James rendering of this verse, which reads "on earth peace, good will toward men." But notice the difference shared by both the New American Bible and New International Version translations, which are more faithful to the original Greek: "on earth peace to those on whom his favor rests." The St. Paul Catholic Edition of the New Testament, also a literal translation from Greek, translates this as "peace to those in whom he is pleased."

There is a big difference between peace and good will to all people, and peace to those on whom God's favor rests—people of good will. It is not that God is exclusive and chooses to whom he will offer his peace, because he offers it to everyone. But peace is only realized when people accept the offer and live with good will. So these words of the angels—translated more accurately here—reflect both God's generosity and humanity's responsibility to respond to it, whereas our current translation emphasizes only the former.

PART TWO: THE LITURGY OF THE WORD

Proclamation of the Gospel

PRIEST OR DEACON: The Lord be with you.

PEOPLE: And with your Spirit.

As noted earlier, this dialogue between an ordained minister and the people is not a greeting. The priest or deacon, whose spirit has been configured to Christ in a unique way through their ordination, is offering a blessing from Christ; the assembly responds with a profession of faith that the ordained minister's spirit has indeed been configured to Christ and we believe Christ is truly present in the proclamation of the Gospel.

The Nicene Creed

***I believe in one God,
the Father almighty,
maker of heaven and earth,
of all things visible and invisible.***

***I believe in one Lord Jesus Christ,
the Only Begotten Son of God,
born of the Father before all ages.
God from God, Light from Light,
true God from true God,
begotten, not made, consubstantial with the Father;
through him all things were made.***

***For us men and for our salvation
he came down from heaven,***

[At the words that follow up to and including “became man,” all bow.]

***and by the Holy Spirit was incarnate
of the Virgin Mary,
and became man.***

***For our sake he was crucified under Pontius Pilate,
he suffered death and was buried,
and rose again on the third day
in accordance with the Scriptures.
He ascended into heaven
and is seated at the right hand of the Father.
He will come again in glory
to judge the living and the dead
and his kingdom will have no end.***

***I believe in the Holy Spirit, the Lord, the giver of life,
who proceeds from the Father and the Son,
who with the Father and the Son is adored and glorified,
who has spoken through the prophets.***

***I believe in one, holy, catholic and apostolic Church.
I confess one baptism for the forgiveness of sins
and I look forward to the resurrection of the dead
and the life of the world to come. Amen.***

The Creed says “I believe,” not “We believe.” The English translators in the early 1970’s took this liberty to emphasize that this is not a personal, individual belief—it is a shared belief, held by all members of the body. It is the faith of the Church, not just mine.

While that point is well taken, the fact remains that each of us must profess “I believe this too”—that’s why I am part of this body, because I personally profess

the faith we share in common. When each of us proclaims “I believe” in unison, the harmony of our voices turns it into “We believe.”

At first glance the phrase **“born of the Father before all ages”** may seem to contradict the subsequent statement that the Son of God was **“begotten, not made.”** (“Born” implies a beginning, as does “made.”) “Begotten, not made” emphasizes that the Son of God, the second person of the Holy Trinity, has no beginning, he has always existed with the Father and the Holy Spirit. (While he became incarnate in Bethlehem at a certain point in time, the Son in his divinity has always existed.) Thus the 1970’s translation renders **“born of the Father before all ages”** as **“eternally begotten of the Father”** to avoid the word “born,” which implies a beginning.

But to say that the Son was “born” of the Father before all ages still affirms the Son’s eternity. “Before all ages” means before time existed. Since beginning and ending are relative to time, to be “born before all ages”—outside the bounds of time—still means he had no beginning. The word “born” is used here because it expresses an intimate love relationship between the Father and Son which “begotten” does not articulate.

“Consubstantial with the Father” is the precise theological term replacing **“one in Being with the Father.”** It literally means the Father and the Son are of the same “substance,” both divine and eternal.

“By the power of the Holy Spirit was incarnate of the Virgin Mary” replaces **“by the power of the Holy Spirit he was born of the Virgin Mary,”** for in this context “born” can be misleading. Now we’re talking about Jesus taking flesh in time. To be “born” in time means to have a beginning, which can be confusing when referring to the eternal Son of God. The proper word is “incarnate,” which means that an eternal being who is outside the bounds of time and space has now taken on a bodily form in time.

The new translation says that Jesus **“suffered death”**—meaning that death was the object of his suffering. The 1970’s translation separates Jesus’ death from his suffering, listing them as two distinct events, with death following his suffering: **“he suffered, died, and was buried.”** This may seem like a small detail, but it is crucial in understanding why Jesus died.

The 1970's translation confines Jesus' suffering to the physical and emotional trauma he experienced before dying, as if his death were a relief from his suffering. This is not what the Creed really says—it says death itself is what Jesus suffered. This does not negate or trivialize Jesus' suffering before his death—rather, it makes a dramatic point about death itself, because death was a suffering even worse than the passion.

Here's why: God created human beings to live forever in relationship with him—he never willed for us to die. Death entered the world as a result of sin—the natural result of humanity's decision to cut ties with our source of life. Thus death originated from sin as eternal separation from God, which is worse than even the most intense physical or emotional pain we could suffer in our earthly lives.

It is that death that Jesus entered, in order to save us from it. Because that death was humanity's most horrible experience (expressed by the cry of “My God, why have you abandoned me?”) Jesus suffered it. It is because of his entering that awful state—going into the abode of the dead—that we are saved from it, and our death was redeemed from being an end of our life with God and transformed into a passage to the eternal life with God that he intended for us in the first place.

Now, instead of death being a suffering worse than our most intense earthly pain, our earthly suffering pales in contrast to the glorious life awaiting us after our earthly death—because Jesus suffered death and rose again on the third day.

PART THREE: THE LITURGY OF THE EUCHARIST

PRIEST: The Lord be with you.

PEOPLE: And with your spirit.

PRIEST: Lift up your hearts.

PEOPLE: We lift them up to the Lord.

PRIEST: Let us give thanks to the Lord our God.

PEOPLE: It is right and just.

“It is right and just” is the accurate translation of this response. It replaces “It is right to give Him thanks and praise.” Perhaps it is self-evident that it is right to give God thanks and praise. Why is it “just?”

St. Thomas Aquinas developed the idea of worship as an act of justice, and it is an integral concept to any religion. Justice occurs when everyone has what rightfully belongs to them—everyone is given their due. Since God is our Father, the source and sustainer of our life, we owe God worship. It is more than something right to do—it is something we are obligated to do, justice demands it. If we do not begin seeking justice by giving God the worship that is his due to Him, we cannot expect justice to happen anywhere else.

Following the Preface, we pray:

Holy, Holy, Holy Lord God of hosts.

Heaven and earth are full of your glory.

Hosanna in the highest.

Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord.

Hosanna in the highest.

The literal “God of hosts” replaces the looser “God of power and might.” St. Mary’s parishioners have become familiar with this Latin text, since we chant this prayer in Latin during Lent. The first line in Latin, of which the first line above is a literal translation, reads: “*Sanctus, Sanctus, Sanctus Dominus Deus Sabaoth.*” *Sabaoth* is not Latin—it is a Hebrew word taken from the Old Testament. It can be translated as either “hosts” or “armies,” but the Old Testament limits its use to a title for God as “God of hosts.” (Another word is used to refer to armies.) The hosts are the Heavenly hosts, and the invocation of this title “God of hosts” is important at this point in the Mass. We are about to kneel as the bread and wine are changed into the actual Body and Blood of Jesus Christ. We are not the only ones worshipping as Heaven touches upon earth during this awesome moment—all of Heaven worships with us as well. We are joined at every Mass not only by those worshippers we can see with our physical eyes—the entire Body of Christ, including the Heavenly Kingdom, kneels and worships with us. Invoking the “God of Hosts” reminds us of this.

“Hosanna in the highest. Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord” is what the crowds shouted as Jesus entered Jerusalem, where he would sacrifice himself on the cross for the forgiveness of sins. We say these same words as this same sacrifice is about to be re-presented in our midst (not happen all over again,

but re-presented in our time and place so we can be present and be physically and spiritually joined to it).

There are four Eucharistic Prayers the priest may choose from. We will not go through all of them here. What we will look at are the words of consecration through which the wine becomes the Blood of Christ. (The words of consecration are the same no matter which Eucharistic Prayer is used.) There is one dramatic change of translation with regards to the Precious Blood that must be understood. The priest says:

***Take this, all of you, and drink from it,
for this is the chalice of my blood,
the blood of the new and eternal covenant,
which will be poured out for you and for many
for the forgiveness of sins.***

We are moving from the mistranslated “will be shed for you and for all” to the accurate “will be poured out for you and for many.” (This is the accurate translation of Jesus’ words in Matthew 26:28 and Mark 14:24.)

The principle here is similar to what was discussed in Part One, in which we saw that the Gloria, based on the accurate translation of Luke 2:14, really says “peace to people of good will,” not “peace to [God’s] people on earth.” It is not that Jesus is exclusive and has died for only certain people. Jesus in fact offers the gift of salvation he won on the cross to everyone. But one must accept this gift, be joined to the sacrifice, and be open to grace in order for it to be efficacious. Saying Jesus shed his blood for all emphasizes God’s generosity alone; saying he shed it for many (which is what the Gospels really proclaim) speaks not only of that generosity, but of our responsibility to respond to it.

PART FOUR: THE COMMUNION RITE

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.

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

“I am not worthy to receive you” is replaced with the literal translation “I am not worthy that you should enter under my roof.” These are the words the Centurion spoke to Jesus in Matthew 8:8, after Jesus responded to the Centurion’s request to heal his servant: “Lord, I am not worthy to have you enter under my roof; only say the word and my servant will be healed.” Jesus said to the crowd: “Amen, I say to you, in no one in Israel have I found such faith,” then to the Centurion: “You may go; as you have believed, let it be done for you.” And at that very hour his servant was healed. (Matthew 8:10, 13)

This is the faith Jesus calls us to have as we approach to receive him in the Eucharist. We admit our unworthiness, and profess our faith in Jesus’ power and desire to heal us.

“Only say the word” is not a denial of the necessity of Jesus’ presence—we are not telling Jesus to avoid literally entering us in the Eucharist, and only “say a word” instead. John’s Gospel clearly teaches that Jesus is the Word—“In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.... All things came to be through him, and without him nothing came to be. What came to be through him was life.... And the Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us, and we saw his glory, the glory of the Father’s only Son, full of grace and truth.” (John 1:1, 3-4, 14)