



Apostolic Greeting (Part 2), “And with your spirit”

The shorter form of the invitation of the Apostolic Greeting, “The Lord be with you” (translated from the Latin, “Dominus vobiscum”) is used throughout the Roman liturgy. The congregation responds to this invitation from the celebrant, “and with your spirit.” Before the new English translation of the Third Edition of the Roman Missal, the English speaking world responded to this invitation, “and also with you” (English and Portuguese were the only two major languages that translated the response in this way) and this translation lost much of the theology behind the response.

On the First Sunday of Advent 2011, when the new English Translation of the Roman Missal began use in the U.S., this short response was perhaps the most difficult retranslation of the Order of Mass for many to get used to (particularly if it was spoken and not sung) and for years many worshipping communities struggled with a mix of “and with your spirit” and the previous translation “and also with you” coming from the congregation. Even now, over eleven years later, many are unaware of the theology behind this response. Understanding the theology behind the words we use in the liturgy is of great importance in order for our liturgical prayer to clearly reflect what we believe (Lex Orandi, Lex Credendi).

The response “And with your spirit” is indeed a more literal translation of “Et cum spiritu tuo,” however, good liturgical translation not only expresses literal meaning, but also proper theological meaning! The translation “and with your spirit” expresses theology that can be traced all the way back to Moses, which is recalled in the Rite of Ordination of Priests. In the Prayer of Consecration, the bishop lays hands on the the candidate for ordination and prays, “In the desert you implanted the spirit of Moses in the hearts of seventy wise men; and with their help he ruled your people with greater ease. Lord, now look upon us in our weakness and grant us this servant that he might share in the priesthood of Jesus, your Son.”

This prayer references Moses leading the chosen people through the desert and the people start to complain and drive Moses crazy (after walking through a hot desert for so long, I’m sure you can imagine why they were complaining)! Moses has just about had it and prays and tells God he is done leading these people and God tells Moses to get seventy wise men and God will take a little bit of Moses’ spirit (the spirit of counsel, wisdom, fortitude, understanding) and give it to each of the seventy men to help Moses lead the people with greater ease.

In the same way, in the Prayer of Consecration, the bishop prays to God that the same spirit which was taken from Moses and given to the seventy men (and from them to ordained priests, then to bishop to bishop throughout the centuries through apostolic succession) now be given to this candidate for ordination, allowing him to lead the people he is appointed to shepherd, gracefully with greater ease.

And so in the liturgy, the celebrant proclaims, “The Lord be with you,” or may the Lord who has gathered the baptized together, prepare you for the liturgical work we are about to do. And the congregation responds, “and with your spirit” or may you (the ordained priest) use those charismatic gifts you received through ordination (that same spirit that was taken from Moses and given to you) to now lead us in this liturgical work, the source and summit of the entire life of the Church!

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