

Fr. Paul Turner

## Notre Dame Center for Liturgy Web Presentation 2

Perhaps one of the more mysterious changes to the English translation of the mass is the people's response to the greeting, "The Lord be with you." Currently, the response is, "And also with you," but the new translation will have everyone say, "And with your spirit."

Many people are familiar with the original Latin dialogue: *Dominus vobiscum. Et cum spiritu tuo*. The revised English will be closer to the expressions in Latin. The Vatican's new rules for translation, published in 2001 under the title *Liturgiam authenticam*, singled out this response to be rendered more closely. Paragraph 56 states, "Certain expressions that belong to the heritage of the whole or of a great part of the ancient Church, as well as others that have become part of the general human patrimony, are to be respected by a translation that is as literal as possible, as for example the words of the people's response *Et cum spiritu tuo*." We can do that, but many people will find its meaning hard to grasp.

The best approach is through scripture. Most what we say at mass is rooted in the bible. After all, it is the Word of God that forms us and inspires us to pray. Paul concludes four of his epistles with an expression very much like the one we use for the greeting at mass. For example, at the end of the Second Letter to Timothy, Paul asks Timothy to greet a number of their coworkers, and then he concludes with these words to his friend: "The Lord be with your spirit. Grace be with you." (These quotes are taken from the New Revised Standard Version of the bible.) At the end of the Letter to the Galatians, Paul concludes with a similar prayer, this time for the entire community: "May the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with your spirit, brothers and sisters. Amen." The letter to the Philippians ends with a shortened version of that same prayer, again addressed to the entire community: "The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ be with your spirit." The brief letter to Philemon concludes exactly the same way. Paul writes that letter written to his friend and coworker Philemon, to Apphia and Archippus, and to the church in Philemon's house, the community of the faithful who gather there for prayer. Paul signs off to all of them in this way: "The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ be with your spirit."

The dialogue of the mass has split this short prayer into two parts. Paul originally wrote, "The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ be with your spirit," or even, "The Lord be with your spirit." But in the liturgy there is a long tradition that divides the text. The priest or the deacon says, "The Lord be with you," and the people respond, "and with your spirit."

So, what does it mean? Well, we'd have to ask Saint Paul about that. But he liked the expression enough to use it again and again at the close of his letters. By "your spirit" Paul is probably referring to an attitude, a demeanor, a philosophy, or comportment. He probably means the spirit you have when you wake up, when you enjoy the company of your family,

the spirit you take to school or work, and the spirit that organizes your thought and action. Paul wanted his Christian friends to remain free from a secular spirit, a self-absorbed spirit, or even a dejected spirit. He wanted them to have the spirit of Christ, a spirit that brings hope and meaning to a person's thoughts and acts. Paul tells the Philippians, "Let each of you look not to your own interests, but to the interests of others. Let the same mind be in you that was in Christ Jesus" (2:4-5). He tells the Colossians, "let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts. . . . And be thankful. Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly. . . . And whatever you do, in word or deed, do everything in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him" (3:15-17). In so many words, "The Lord be with your spirit," is a way of praying that the Lord will be your companion, the joy of your heart, and the light of your life.

Divided into two parts, this greeting appears in the liturgy in a work dating to the 3<sup>rd</sup> or 4<sup>th</sup> century, a work called *The Apostolic Tradition*. There it forms part of the dialogue that opens the eucharistic prayer. We still use it there today, followed by expressions that are just as old: "Lift up your hearts," and so on.

By the 5<sup>th</sup> c. a tradition developed that the "spirit" in this greeting referred to the Holy Spirit received by the priest through the imposition of hands. To this day, the liturgy of the Church still restricts this particular dialogue to those occasions when a priest or deacon leads it. In its biblical origins, however, the word "spirit" had a much broader application.

As the mass developed in Latin over the next many centuries, this greeting remained untouched. In the late 1960s as the mass was being translated into vernacular languages around the world, language groups made different choices for rendering the words *Et cum spiritu tuo*. Most of those groups kept close to Saint Paul's original wording. In French, German, Italian, and Spanish, for example, people have been saying the equivalent of "And with your spirit." Vietnamese doesn't have a word for "spirit" that works well in this context, so people have been saying something like, "And with you, Priest," or "And with you, Deacon." However in Dutch and in English, the response changed to "And also with you." One story is that the proposed English translation for the greeting was originally a direct quote from Saint Paul, "The Lord be with your spirit," to which the people would respond, "And also with you." But in the end, the greeting reverted back to the simpler one traditional to the liturgy, "The Lord be with you," while the free translation of the response remained, "And also with you." The net result gave us a dialogue that made contextual sense, but one that omitted the word "spirit" from the greeting and the response.

The new translation is meant to enrich the text along the lines of its long liturgical tradition and with its biblical roots. When you think about it, for nearly 2000 years Christians have been saying to one another, "The Lord be with you." "And with your spirit." That is, except for one major international language group, and for about 40 years. English-speakers find ourselves part of the only generation in the history of Christianity that changed the reply.

The new translation will therefore bring more unity to the way the response is made among all the languages of the world, and with all previous Christian generations.

Incidentally, the first part of this dialogue also comes from the bible. “The Lord be with you” can be found in Ruth 2:4, where it appears to be a normal way of saying hello. It reappears with minor variations in Judges 6:12 and in 2 Chronicles 15:2. In fact, the angel Gabriel uses it to greet Mary at the annunciation in Luke 1:28. It is quoted in a very popular Catholic prayer: “Hail, full of grace, the Lord is with you.” At the end of Matthew’s gospel, Jesus promised he would be with us to the end of the world. So hearing “The Lord be with you” connects us with God’s faithful people in both the Old and the New Testaments, and with the promised eternal presence of Jesus Christ.

The other greetings the priest may use at the beginning of mass also quote Saint Paul. “The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the communion of the Holy Spirit be with you all.” That comes from the last line of the Second Letter to the Corinthians (12:13). And “Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ” can be found many times in Paul’s letters; for example, at the beginning of the First Letter to the Corinthians (1:3).

Based on its biblical roots, the two parts of the greeting express a mutual desire, that the Lord will be present among the people and with the minister. This point is clear from the response that English-speakers have been giving all along: “And also with you.” But by changing the words to, “And with your spirit,” the language becomes a little more elevated, the greeting aligns with those made by Christians of every time and place, and the spiritual nature of this gathering is affirmed.

It’s more than saying, “Good morning,” or “Good evening.” It’s a way of saying there’s something else going on here. There is a spirit here. The Lord is here. We gather in that spirit, to develop that spirit. When Christians greet one another, that is how we proclaim that Christ is here.