

New and Corrected Translation of the Mass – Part 2

The Greeting

✠ *Dóminus vobíscum.*

✠ **The Lord be with you.**

Ruth 2.4

✠ *Et cum spírítu tuo.*

✠ **And with your spirit.**

Gal 6.18; 2 Tim 4.22

The priest greets the people with a prayer ('The Lord be with you'), not a declaration ('The Lord is with you'). In the Bible, only an angel says this as a declaration (Jdg 6.12; Luke 1.28), and is correct because it is God's declaration through the angel. The only time a man says it in the Bible (2 Sam 7.3), he turns out to be wrong! We must be careful not to turn what is genuine prayer into genuine presumption. So this greeting is always offered as a prayer ('be'), and not as a presumptuous declaration ('is').

The people respond with a biblical phrase: 'And with your spirit.' St Paul often used this expression. When applied to humans, 'spirit' (*pneuma*) is that spiritual part of man which is closest to God, the immediate object of divine influence, and the receptacle of the Spirit of God. Our response is certainly not the equivalent of 'You too, mate!' That is why our new translation of the Mass no longer says, 'And also with you', as though this were simply an exchange of greetings. It isn't.

Why 'your spirit' instead of 'you'? The spirit referred to here is the spirit of Christ which comes to a man when he is ordained, as St Paul explains to St Timothy; the spirit of Christ which is in Timothy through Paul's laying on of hands.

So when the people respond to the priest, 'And with your spirit', they are declaring that *Christ* is the head of the liturgical assembly, not the priest, no matter which priest it may be. The people are thus also offering a prayer: that the priest may truly and humbly represent Christ to them and for them, as Christ uses the priest to offer the holy sacrifice of the Mass.

So Mass begins with the priest praying that God may be with the people, and with the people praying that God may be with their priest. What looks like a simple greeting is actually a beautiful example of how Christians ought to pray. This same formula of greeting is found in all the ancient Orthodox churches as well. Over the Sacred Triduum we hear it on Holy Saturday, in the reading at Matins, from an ancient second century homily: *And with your spirit*. This is just one of the gems of Holy Mass the new, corrected translation will re-reveal to us.