

“And with Your Spirit”

Daniel Merz, SLL

Probably the most noticeable change for the laity in the revised translation of *The Roman Missal* will be the response to “The Lord be with you,” which restores the phrase “And with your spirit” in place of “And also with you.” This change is specifically called for by *Liturgiam Authenticam*, the instruction from the Congregation for Divine Worship and the Discipline of the Sacraments regarding the translation of liturgical texts. It states that the Latin phrase, *Et cum spiritu tuo*, must be translated as literally as possible. English is the only major European language that does not mention the spirit in the current translation of this response; the Greek liturgy of the Eastern Churches also employs the equivalent of “And with your spirit.” So the new form has both tradition and widespread use on its side. Underlying the use are scriptural and theological reasons.

This ancient Christian use of “spirit,” in both Greek and Latin, was strange to the ancient world. “Nothing like it is known outside Christian writing” (Paulinus Milner, “Et Cum Spiritu Tuo” in *Studies in Pastoral Liturgy*, vol. 3. ed. by Placid Murray, OSB, Dublin: The Furrow Trust, 1967. p. 202). “With your spirit” was long thought to be a Semitic idiom meaning nothing more than “with you.” The Hebrew word *nephesh* means “soul” or “spirit,” but it can also mean “self.” But the Hebrew word behind “with your spirit” is not *nephesh* but rather another Hebrew term, *ruah*, which means “breath” or “spirit.” The Greek word for spirit, *pneuma*, is never used in the Old Testament to render *nephesh*, but only when translating *ruah*. Thus, it seems clear that the use of “spirit” in the liturgy is not intended merely as a euphemism for “you” but bears some other special theological significance.

Sometimes, Saint Paul calls the gifts of the Holy Spirit *pneumata* (cf. 1 Corinthians 14:12: “So with yourselves, since you are eager for *pneumatōn*, spiritual gifts . . .” and 14:32, “The spiritual gifts of the prophets are subject to the prophets”; see similar usage in Revelation 22:6 and 19:10). The episcopal ordination prayer of *The Apostolic Tradition* (third or fourth century AD) asks God for the “spirit of leadership”: “And now also pour forth the power which comes from you, of the spirit of leadership which you gave to your beloved Child, Jesus Christ, and which he accorded to your holy apostles who have founded the Church in every place . . .” This ordination prayer, then, specifically refers to a gift of the spirit that was given to Christ, which Christ in turn bestowed on the



apostles, and which this prayer shows is bestowed upon bishops in the Church. The ordination prayer for priests similarly asks, “Look upon your servant who is here and grant him the *spirit* of grace and of council of the presbytery so that he may aid and govern your people with a pure heart . . .” In the prayer for deacons: “Grant the *spirit* of grace and zeal to your servant.”

Given the petitions employed in these ordination prayers, it is noteworthy that the phrase, “And with your spirit” is used only in response to an ordained minister. The non-ordained member leading the assembly in prayer (for example, at a wake service, a Holy Communion service, the Liturgy of the Hours), would never say “The Lord be with you” because, at least in part, they do not receive the

phrase in return “And with your spirit.” The “spirit” mentioned here refers specifically to the spirit received in ordination. It is an affirmation by the assembly that the ordained minister has received the appropriate anointing with the spirit to make him the leader in sacramental ministry. This usage has a special beauty: it is less about the *person* of the priest than about the *office of the priesthood*, which is supported and guaranteed by the Spirit of God given in ordination. Early Church Fathers, such as John Chrysostom, Theodore of Mopsuestia, Narsai of Nisibis, and Abraham bar Lipheh explicitly back this interpretation.

One scriptural usage may be set in objection to this interpretation: Galatians 6:18, Philippians 4:23, and Philemon 25 all use “spirit” in a more general sense as addressed to the whole Church: “The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ be with your spirit.” Saint Paul is not referring here to the particular gifts of the Spirit possessed by each member of the local Church, because “spirit” is in the singular. Rather, he is referring to that gift of the Spirit which each local Church possesses in so far as it is a unity in Christ for the worship of the Father (Milner, p. 206). In this sense, the ordained minister represents the whole Church in a way that the non-ordained does not. For this reason, the laity may offer a blessing in their own name only, whereas the ordained bless in the name of the Church—because of the “spirit” they have received in ordination.

FATHER DANIEL MERZ, SLL, is the vice-rector and dean of students at Conception Seminary College in Conception, Missouri.