

Scripture and the Mass

It is clear that Sacred Scripture has a revered and important place in the eucharistic Liturgy. Every Mass includes a Liturgy of the Word. The main elements of the Liturgy of the Word are biblical readings and the singing of a psalm. The Liturgy of the Word reaches its high point in the proclamation of the Gospel.

However, the use of Scripture in the Mass does not end when the Liturgy of the Word has finished. In fact, the words of Scripture flow throughout the prayers of the Mass. One of the goals of the new translation of the *Missal* was to make clearer the links between the prayers of the Mass and the text of Scripture. Some of the most noticeable changes reflect the words of the Bible more clearly. Let's take a look at some of these changes.

A BIBLICAL GREETING

At several points in the Mass, the priest or deacon and the people engage in the following dialogue:

Priest or Deacon: The Lord be with you.
All: And with your spirit. (*The Order of Mass*, 2)

The first words come from a greeting of Boaz, the great-grandfather of King David: "Boaz . . . said to the harvesters, 'The Lord be with you!' and they replied, 'The Lord bless you!'" (Ru 2:4). The people's response reflects the language of St. Paul. In Galatians, he says, "The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with your spirit, brothers. Amen" (Gal 6:18); the Second Letter to Timothy closes with a similar wish: "The Lord be with your spirit" (2 Tm 4:22). The Letter to the Philippians ends with "The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ be with your spirit" (Phil 4:23).

The new language, though a bit unfamiliar to our ears, more directly reflects the biblical understanding that, through Baptism, the Spirit of God dwells in us and unites us as one Body in Christ.

WELCOMING THE LORD

Immediately before coming forward to receive the Lord in Holy Communion, we welcome the Lord:

Lord, I am not worthy
that you should enter under my roof,
but only say the word
and my soul shall be healed. (*The Order of Mass*, 132)

This prayer quotes the words of the centurion who asked Jesus to cure his servant. He would not presume to ask Jesus to come to his home. He trusted in the authority of Jesus' healing word, saying: "Lord, I am not worthy to have you enter under my roof; only say the word and my servant will be healed" (Mt 8:8; see Lk 7:6-7). This new phrasing reminds us that, in receiving Holy Communion, we are to emulate the centurion's humility and faith.

FOR THE MANY

One of the most notable changes will come in the words that the priest speaks in consecrating the wine as the Blood of Christ:

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. (*The Order of Mass*, 90)

The newly translated text more closely reflects the scriptural accounts of the Last Supper: "Then he took a cup, gave thanks, and gave it to them, saying, 'Drink from it, all of you, for this is my blood of the covenant, which will be shed on behalf of many for the forgiveness of sins'" (Mt 26:27-28). Much attention has focused on a single change in this text: from "for all" to "for many." This change is unique to the English language. Other languages, including Spanish, French, and German, have already been using language that more closely reflects Jesus' words at the Last Supper.

This new text does not mean that God's love is limited or that only some may be saved. Rather, it reflects the fact that human beings may choose to accept the grace of salvation and live their lives in the light of this grace.

DEEPER UNDERSTANDING

If we recognize the biblical references that underlie the liturgical texts, we will have a fuller understanding of their meaning. For example, Eucharistic Prayer I includes the following passage:

Be pleased to look upon these offerings
with a serene and kindly countenance,
and to accept them,
as you were pleased to accept
the gifts of your servant Abel the just,
the sacrifice of Abraham, our father in faith,
and the offering of your high priest Melchizedek,
a holy sacrifice, a spotless victim. (*The Order of Mass*, 93)

If we do not know who Abel (Gn 4:4) and Melchizedek (Gn 14:18-20) are and if we do not understand the importance of Abraham's sacrifice (Gn 15:7-21; 22:1-14), we will not fully appreciate the concept of sacrifice and how our celebration of the eucharistic sacrifice ties us to our ancestors in the faith, from the very beginning.

THE WORD OF GOD IN SCRIPTURE AND THE EUCHARIST

Translating the liturgical texts with a close eye to their correspondence with the texts of Scripture can help us to develop a greater appreciation of the close links between the prayers of the Mass and Sacred Scripture. These close links can help draw us more deeply into the theological meaning of the texts.

For example, before the Communion Rite, the priest breaks the Host and shows it to the people, saying:

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.
(*The Order of Mass*, 132)

The first part of this prayer echoes the words of John the Baptist, heralding the coming of the Christ: "The next day he [John] saw Jesus coming toward him and said, 'Behold, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world'" (Jn 1:29). In the same way, we who are united in the Body of Christ in the Sacrament of Baptism and strengthened in the Eucharist are called to point others to Jesus through our words and actions.

The second part of this prayer reflects the words of the Book of Revelation: "Then the angel said to me, 'Write this: Blessed are those who have been called to the wedding feast of the Lamb'" (Rev 19:9). In this prayer, we are not rejoicing that we may receive the Eucharist. Instead, we rejoice for those who have been found worthy to share in the heavenly Liturgy, the supper of the Lamb, and we pray that one day, we may join them in the everlasting life of the Kingdom of God.

CONCLUSION

By delving more deeply into the scriptural background of the Mass, we come to know more closely Jesus, the Word of God made flesh, whose Paschal Mystery we celebrate.

REFERENCE

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