



Greeting Christ

The greetings of the Roman Missal help us to understand the role of the priest and the people in celebrating the sacred liturgy

by Cardinal George Pell

EDITOR'S NOTE: This is the first in a series of articles on the *Roman Missal* in anticipation of the new English-language translation, effective in the United States beginning Nov. 27.

When Catholics throughout the English-speaking world begin to use the new translation of the *Roman Missal* for the first time, they will notice a change at the beginning of Mass in one of the most familiar dialogues of the sacred liturgy.

This dialogue, spoken before every important liturgical action or prayer, is an expression of the roles of the priest and the people at Mass. When the priest says “The Lord be with you” (*“Dominus vobiscum”*), he prays that the Lord will be with the gathered faithful — the same Lord who, through baptism, has made them a royal priesthood and who has said that where two or three are gathered in his name he would be present (cf. 2 Pet 2:9, Mt 18:20).

In response, the people will now say: “And with your spirit” (*“Et cum spiritu tuo”*). Here the faithful acknowledge the difference between the common priesthood of the baptized and the ministerial priesthood, which is received through the sacrament of holy orders. In this sacrament, the priest has been anointed with the same spirit that God sent down upon the 70 wise men who helped Moses rule the Israelites.

Wandering in the desert after God had liberated the chosen people from bondage in Egypt, Moses experienced great frustration with the complaints of the people, which led him to lament to God: “Why do you treat your servant so badly? ... If this is the way you will deal with me, then please do me the favor of killing me at once, so that I need no longer face this distress” (Num 11:11,15). What happened next provides a key to our understanding the response, “And with your spirit.”

The Lord directed Moses to assemble 70 of the elders of Israel and said, “When they are in place beside you, I will come down and speak with you there. I will also take

some of the spirit that is on you and will bestow it on them, that they may share the burden of the people with you” (Num 11:17).

As God once distributed the spirit that was upon Moses to the elders, so, too, do bishops today pray during the ordination of priests: “Lord, in our weakness, [we ask you] to grant us these helpers that we need to exercise the priesthood that comes from the Apostles.” In effect, God takes some of the spirit that the bishop received by his ordination, which is the fullness of the ministerial priesthood, and places it upon the newly ordained priests so that they can assist him in exercising the priesthood of Christ.

In addition to “The Lord be with you,” there are two other greetings that a priest may use at the beginning of Mass. One is taken from St. Paul’s Second Letter to the Corinthians: “The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the communion of the Holy Spirit be with you all” (13:13). Here, Paul asks that the Church might know the

same intimate communion of love that is born of the life of the Holy Trinity.

The other greeting is also taken from St. Paul’s letters (cf. Eph 1:2, Gal 1:3): “Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.” This ancient text asks that the presence and peace of God remain active in our lives that we might be drawn more deeply into the sacred mysteries that we are about to celebrate.

By these greetings, the priest “signifies the presence of the Lord to the assembled community” and, together with the faithful, reminds us how “the mystery of the Church gathered together is made manifest” (*General Instruction of the Roman Missal*, 50). In this way, the greetings help prepare us for the celebration of the sacred mysteries that are the source and the summit of the Christian life. ♦

CARDINAL GEORGE PELL, archbishop of Sydney, served as chairman of the Vox Clara Committee, formed to oversee the new translation of the *Roman Missal*.

