

CHURCH CHAT

BY

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NEW LITURGY CHRISTMAS

In the spirit of the new liturgy, I want to wish you a Merry Christmas. But, to get it closer to Latin, the language we now know that God speaks, I have to translate my greetings into Latin and then transliterate the message back into English. Whew!

The problem is that my Latin is rusty and my translation skills are minimal, if not befuddled. For example, using my method, Merry Christmas comes out Merryisimus Christmicus. I'm not sure if that is the purest English of the Latin greeting but I am trying to conform to the spirit of our linguistic, liturgical reform. After all, if God speaks Latin, we should do our best to speak it also. I figure getting close, counts.

What better way to wish you a Merry Christmas than with a hymn? And what better hymn than *Silent Night*? Of course, this carol written by Rev. Joseph Mohr in 1816 was originally in German. So, to get it in "most favored condition", I will have to turn the German into Latin and then into English. I will try. You can supply the melody, even though you may have to scrunch up some of the syllables to fit the tune. But it's worth it in order to have the words more closely match the divine tongue. Here goes:

Silens nocturnal, sanctified nocturnal,
Omni is paxified, omni is lucid
Proximate virgin
Maternal and kidiker.
Sanctified babycus, so tendermus and mildiker,
Somulate in celestial pax,
Somulate in celestial pax.

Silens nocturnal, sanctified nocturnal,
Shepherds tremulate at the vista;
Glories stream from celestial regions,
Celestial populations vocalize alleluia!
Christus liberator is generated
Christus liberator is generated.

Now, isn't that better? I know "consubstantial" fits in there somewhere but I just can't quite get the translation right. Sorry.

Some of this may sound a little funny right now but once we get used to it, it will be okay. And remember the payoff: when we pray Latinized English, we are praying in a language that God understands best. I know God has a well-deserved reputation for being a very good linguist but He/She/They think and talk among Themselves in Latin. It is clearly in our own best interest to follow their lead and do our best with the dead language also.

I am also struggling with another part of the reformed liturgical language. It's that simple greeting/prayer: "The Lord be with you." That part is straightforward enough: the celebrant prays that the Lord may be with us. Nice. Thanks. We do say it pretty often during one Mass (once again, the preferred term instead of Eucharist), so I wonder if the Lord sticks around for a while, gets bored, leaves, and needs to be re-summoned. A little confusing but manageable. In any case, it is a welcomed prayer/greeting.

It is our response to this greeting that I have the most trouble with. My reflex response is still: "And also with you". If I have that laminated card in my hand I usually say the Latinized and proper "And with your spirit" which nostalgically hearkens back to my youth. But without the cheat sheet, I revert to "And also with you." Good thing that pew card is laminated. It's going to take some time.

Here's my main confusion: the celebrant addresses all of me when he says "you". But I respond to only part of him when I say "spirit." What happens to the other parts of him? Logic forces me to get picky here. Does his "spirit" include his intelligence, consciousness, awareness, emotional life, psyche, intuition, creativity, analytical processes, memory, and those mysterious things that psychics refer to? Or does "spirit" only mean that part of him that channels the God within him? I presume that "spirit" excludes his body, even though our common distinction between body and soul is Greek, not scriptural.

I like to know what I am praying for, so these questions are fair enough.

My Christmas wish for my celebrant (there's a lot less "we" and much more "I" in these reforms) is that the Lord may also be with all those parts of him that are not his "spirit". I don't get to say that in Mass anymore, so I bundle them all together in a Christmas wish.

Merryisimus Christmicus.