

Angels in the Preface

THE Weekday Preface n. 2 in the *Novus Ordo* Mass is the old Common Preface with slight additions.

The following translation is deliberately unpolished and very literal, so that the words almost match the order of the Latin, to facilitate singing by those with little Latin.

DIALOGUE AND PREFACE

Priest: Dominus vobiscum.

The Lord be with you.

PEOPLE: Et cum spiritu tuo.

And with thy spirit.

Priest: Sursum corda.

Lift up your hearts.

PEOPLE: Habemus ad Dominum

We lift them up to the Lord.

Priest: **Gratias agamus Domino Deo nostro**

Let us give thanks to the Lord our God.

PEOPLE: Dignum et iustum est.

Right and just it is (to do so).

VERE dignum et iustum est, aequum et salutare,

It is truly right and just, fitting and salutary,

nos Tibi semper et ubique gratias agere:

for us always and everywhere to give Thee thanks:

Domine, Sancte Pater, omnipotens aeternae Deus.

Lord, Holy Father, Almighty and Eternal God

Qui bonitate hominem condidisti,

Who in goodness created man,

ac iustitia damnatum misericordia redemisti:

and injustice damned him, in mercy redeemed him:

per Christum Dominum nostrum

through Christ our Lord,

per Quem maiestatem Tuam laudant Angeli,

through Whom the Angels praise Thy majesty,

adorant Dominationes, tremunt Potestates,

the Dominations adore, the Powers tremble,

Caeli aelorumque Virtutes,

the Heavens and the heavenly Virtues,

ac beati Seraphim,

and the blessed Seraphim

socia exultatione concelebrant.

in joint exultation concelebrate.

Cum quibus et nostras voces

With whom our voices also,

ut admitti iubeas, deprecamur,

we beseech (Thee), that Thou commandest (us) to be joined,

supplici confessione dicentes:

in humble praise saying:

Priest and PEOPLE: **Sanctus...**

Holy...

ANGELIC HYMNS

At Mass there are one or two hymns of the angels:

- the opening words of the *Gloria*, which are the angels hymn heard by the shepherds (Luke 2:14),
- the *Sanctus*, which is modified from Isaiah 6:3, where the seraphim (their only mention in the Bible) *sing one to another* about the Lord, conscious of the Lord's presence, akin to that respectful mode of speaking to royalty in the third person. (In ordinary life, this device is sometimes used to be rude, to 'put someone down' by talking as though they were not present, e.g. in *David Copperfield*, Betty Trotwood talks *at* Miss Murdstone by addressing only her brother.)

In the Mass, the text of the *Sanctus*, "Holy, Holy, Holy Lord" is followed by the *Benedictus*, "Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord", from Psalm 117:26, which is used in for Our Lord's Triumphant Entry as the Messiah (Matthew 21:9). In the *Catholic Family Catechism Disciples' Edition* p. 79, this latter text illustrates the Sacrament of Holy Orders.

CRESCENDO

This Preface mounts to a climax to introduce the *Sanctus* by listing five of the nine choirs of angels (though the ICEL translator flattens them out). Included are Angels, Dominations, Powers, Virtues and Seraphs. Implicit are Archangels, Thrones, Principalities and Cherubs.

But what translation can do justice to the cadences of vowel sounds and the rhythms in the *Per quem* of this Preface? Or to its majestic antitheses:

- the Powers tremble (not trample, but tremble!)
- the Dominations adore (not take, but give homage!)
- lowly man joins with angelic choirs, blending unearned privilege and blessed surprise.

The Gregorian chants of the Latin Prefaces are genuinely 'in tune' with the words. Likewise, the chants for the *Sanctus* express "the idea of the Holy", the sense of the Sacred: *mysterium tremendum et fascinans*, "a mystery tremendous and fascinating", "wonder and awe in God's Presence", holy fear, the Seventh Gift of the Holy Spirit, e.g. The chant for the *Sanctus* in Mass VII, *Missa de Angelis*.

Another climax in some Prefaces (and there are others again, with less or no listing of the angels):

Et ideo cum angelis et archangelis, cum thronis et dominationibus, cumque omni militia caelestis exercitus, hymnum glories Tuae canimus, sine fine dicentes: Sanctus etc.

Which can be translated:

"And therefore with angels and archangels, with thrones and dominations and all the heavenly host, we sing the hymn of Thy glory, saying without end: Holy."

Finally, Cardinal Newman's "Praise to the Holiest in the height" is actually the last of the angelic hymns of his *The Dream of Gerontius*. The others are worthy of study, and of singing and memorising.

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