

“My sacrifice and yours”
by Christopher Carstens
November 9, 2010

At the conclusion of the preparation of the Gifts at Mass, the priest invites those present to pray, saying: “Pray, brothers and sisters, that our sacrifice may be acceptable to God, the almighty Father.” The priest will use these words until Advent in the year 2011, when he will make the same invitation according to a new translation: “Pray, brothers and sisters, that *my sacrifice and yours* may be acceptable to God, the almighty Father.”

The question we should ask is “Why the change?” What meaning does “my sacrifice and yours” give us that “our sacrifice” does not?

While it is true to say that something that is mine and yours is “ours,” the more literal translation of *meum ac vestrum sacrificium* as “my sacrifice and yours” conveys a greater depth of meaning. First, it conveys the complementary parts of the Mystical Body of Christ; second, it speaks more clearly of the participation of the laity in the offering of the sacrifice of the altar.

In a sermon of St. Leo the Great (read during the Office of Readings on his feast day, November 10), the saintly pope speaks beautifully and clearly about the various parts of the single worshipping Body. He says:

Although the universal Church of God is constituted of distinct orders of members, still, in spite of the many parts of its holy body, the Church subsists as an integral whole, just as the Apostle says: “We are all one in Christ;” nor is anyone separated from the office of another in such a way that a lower group has no connection with the head. In the unity of faith a baptism, our community is then undivided.

In the new translation of the Mass, the words “my sacrifice and yours” signifies the “distinct orders of members” in the one Church which offer the one sacrifice on the altar. For there is only one sacrifice (and one priesthood), but each member of the Church participates in it according to his or her own place in the Church. In other words, the priest offers the sacrifice according to the power received from the Sacrament of Ordination, and the layperson according to the power received from the Sacrament of Baptism.

This brings us to the second benefit of the translation “my sacrifice and yours.” Not only does it speak of the complementarity of the priest and people, but it also calls more clearly to the people to actively participate in the offering.

In the prayer of the “Morning Offering” said to the Sacred Heart of Jesus, we pray: “O Jesus, through the Immaculate Heart of Mary, I offer you my prayers, works, joys, and sufferings of this day, in union with the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass throughout the world.” At this very point in Mass, when the priest invites us to pray that “my sacrifice and yours may be acceptable,” we are asked to join our entire selves—our prayers, works, joys, and sufferings—, everything we have and are, with Christ’s own gift of himself to the Father.

St. Leo, from the same sermon cited above, puts it this way: “For all...are consecrated priests by the oil of the Holy Spirit, so that beyond the special service of our ministry as priests, all spiritual and mature Christians know that they are a royal race and are sharers in the office of the priesthood. For what...is more priestly than to promise the Lord a pure conscience and to offer him in love unblemished victims on the altar of one’s heart?”

“My sacrifice and yours,” then, is a translation that signifies two things: that priest and people offer the sacrifice in their own way, and that the laity are called to share in the offering of the sacrifice by uniting their entire hearts to that of Christ.