

*Singing with the Saints and Angels*

by Christopher Carstens

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Who celebrates the liturgy?

When I first heard this question—it is asked by the Catechism (n.1136)—I thought the answer an obvious one: the priest, the ministers, and the people gathered in the church building. A further reading told me that I was only partly right. The first actors in the liturgy are God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit. A second group are those surrounding the throne of God in heaven: the heavenly powers, the great multitude, the new People of God, the martyrs, all creation, and the holy Mother of God. Finally—contrary to my first instinct—come those of us on earth: “It is in this eternal liturgy that the Spirit and the Church enable us to participate whenever we celebrate the mystery of salvation in the sacraments” (n.1139).

Not only does the Catechism teach us that we are the “part-time” participants in a liturgy that transcends all time and place, but the texts of the liturgy also forms this truth within us. Consider the following texts:

- From the Penitential Act: “...I ask blessed Mary ever-Virgin, all the Angels and Saints” to pray for me.
- From the *Gloria*: “Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace to people of good will.” These words from Luke 2:14 are those of the angels to the shepherds on the night of Jesus’ birth.
- From the Preface Acclamation: “Holy, Holy, Holy Lord God of hosts. Heaven and earth are filled with your glory.” Here our words reflect the angelic hymn as recorded in Isaiah (6:3) and the Book of Revelation (4:8). In fact, the Preface text that precedes the “Holy, Holy” will in the new translation often make explicit reference not only to Angels and Saints, but also to the other ranks: Thrones, Dominions, Powers, Seraphim.
- From the first Eucharistic Prayer: “In communion with those whose memory we venerate, especially the glorious ever-Virgin Mary, Mother of our God and Lord, Jesus Christ, and blessed Joseph, her Spouse, your blessed Apostles and Martyrs, Peter and Paul, Andrew...and all your Saints.”
- From the Preparation for Communion: “Blessed are those called to the supper of the Lamb.” Spoken by John’s heavenly guide, the angel continues: “These words are true; they come from God” (Revelation 19:9).

In reality, our Mass is a participation in the eternal and heavenly liturgy. And in hearing and singing the words of the Mass, we hear the angels and saints and sing with them.

But our heavenly visit is, at this time, only that—a visit. We are called, commanded to take this heavenly perspective and transform the world after its image, helping to form the “new heavens and the new earth” (Revelation 21:1).

Following the Ascension of Jesus, the Apostles are encouraged—by angels?—to go into the world and carry on Jesus’ work: “While they were looking intently at the sky as he was going, suddenly two men dressed in white garments stood beside them. They said, ‘Men of Galilee, why are you standing there looking at the sky? This Jesus who has been taken up from you into heaven will return in the same way as you have seen him going into heaven’” (Acts 1:11).

For us, too, our heavenly and angelic encounter impels us to proclaim the good news in the world. The final words of the Mass command us to “Go!” (*Ite!*), words taken from Jesus upon the same mountain of the Ascension: “Go, therefore, and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the holy Spirit...” (Matthew 28:19).

The translation of the new Missal makes more clear our heavenly participation and empowers us, more clearly, to Go!