



Apostolic Greeting (Part 1)

In the Introductory Rite of Mass the celebrant greets the congregation with the Apostolic Greeting using one of three options, the first (thus preferred) being, “The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God and the COMMUNION of the Holy Spirit be with you all.”

“The communion of the Holy Spirit” is the current English translation of the Latin, “communicatio Sancti Spiritus.” Our previous English translation, translated that same Latin phrase to, “fellowship of the Holy Spirit.” Even for those who have never studied Latin, it is pretty obvious to see that the English word “communion” is a more accurate and literal translation of “communicatio” than the English word “fellowship.” While literal accuracy is important when translating liturgical texts, just as important is theological accuracy. Significant theological meaning was lost when “communicatio” was translated to “fellowship.”

This diagram helps to express the theology of this greeting and what exactly we are being invited to “be with” and participate in. The three members of the Most Holy Trinity are depicted as one with a circle around them (three in one, part of that great mystery of the Trinity, the keyword being “mystery” or that which is beyond understanding). At the top of the circle is “Caritas Dei” or “the love of God,” that great “phileo love” the Father has for the Son and at the bottom of the circle is “Gratia Jesu Christi” or the “grace of our Lord, Jesus Christ,” that great grace and love centered on service and obedience the Son has for the Father. This great, even unimaginable love between the Father and Son is depicted in the center of the circle, “communicatio Sancti Spiritus” or “communion of the Holy Spirit,” which the baptized are being invited to “be with” or participate in every time we celebrate Eucharist!



In the previous English translation of the Roman Missal, the word “fellowship” didn’t really do justice in conveying the theological meaning of “communicatio” and sounded more like we were speaking of the Father and Son going to dinner together and enjoying fellowship rather than that great love which is the “communicatio Sancti Spiritus” that unites the members of the Holy Trinity and our participation in that great mystery!

That ancient axiom, “Lex Orandi, Lex Credendi” (how we pray, especially the words we use, expresses what we believe) has always been at the very ethos of Roman liturgy and this apostolic greeting is an excellent example of how every single word (which we use in our liturgical prayer) must accurately express what we believe!

John Gaffney