

Sermon for Christ the King A (November 19-20, 2011)

Sacred Heart

Salisbury, NC

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About eight weeks ago my best friend from pre-school called me. Her message was simple. She was getting married and hoped that I could attend. So last weekend, in the midst of a whirlwind series of flights and travels that one only makes for a best friend from pre-school, there I was, present in the congregation of a Baptist Church in Mississippi, to watch my friend, now a bride, and her groom profess their wedding vows. It was a sacred moment. The words that the bridegroom speaks to his bride and the words that the bride speaks to the bridegroom are carefully and lovingly chosen for in these words are power, there is history, and there is promise. These are sacred words to be spoken with love, care and intention.

When the Church gathers to celebrate the Sacred Liturgy, to offer the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass, it is a sacred dialogue between Christ the Bridegroom and the Church his bride. In the liturgy of the Mass, Christ the bridegroom is sacramentally re-presented in the person of the priest, the deacon is the friend of the bridegroom, and the glorious and beautiful

bride is the assembly of the baptized. Again and again the scriptures speak of the wedding banquet. The Lord Jesus inaugurates his ministry and performs his first miracle at the wedding at Cana. The entire book of Revelation depicts the wedding feast of the Lamb. When we gather as a body for worship, we are taking part in the wedding feast. The words that we speak are filled with power, with history, and with promise.

Next weekend, the first Sunday of Advent, we will experience the words we speak at Mass anew. In order to deepen our participation in the liturgy and offer to God Most High the most fitting praise our language can offer, we will begin using the revised translation of the Mass. For the most part, the words of the priest, the bridegroom at the wedding banquet have changed. Father John and I, and every other priest in the English speaking world will have many new words and phrases to adjust to. It is an opportunity for us to renew our words of love for Christ, in whose person we act, and the words of love for the Church, whose bridegroom we re-present.

For you, the holy people of God, the bride of the wedding banquet, there are principally two revisions. Yes, there is an extra *holy* in one place and a *greatly* in another, and all of us together will work on the creed in the coming months. Principally, however, there are just two changes for you.

The liturgy contains a particular kind of greeting, a particular way that that we address each other. You are greeted by the priest a number of times in the Mass, and once by the deacon at the proclamation of the gospel, with the phrase *The Lord be with you*. Until now, your response has been *And also with you*. This translation, while conveying part of the idea, lacks the power, history, and promise of the more accurate new translation: *And with your spirit*. Only those who have been ordained address you with *The Lord be with you*. Only those upon whom the bishop has laid hands speak to you in this way. Your response, *And with your spirit*, is your prayer, for the priest or deacon, that he would, following the advice of St. Paul to Timothy, fan into flame the spirit that is within us by the laying on of hands. Your beautiful and precious *And*

*with your spirit* is a prayer and a word of encouragement for our ministry.

The second change occurs at the invitation to Holy Communion. The priest, elevating the Sacred Host and Chalice, announces in the words of John the Baptist: *Behold the Lamb of God, behold him who takes away the sins of the world. Blessed are those called to the supper of the Lamb.* Your response, actually our response for we proclaim these words together, make our own the words of the centurion from the Gospel: *Lord I am not worthy that you should enter under my roof but only say the word and my soul shall be healed.* It was to this statement of the centurion who asked the Lord to heal his servant, that Jesus said he had not seen such great faith in all of Israel. In that sacred moment as we prepare to receive our Lord in Holy Communion, we join in the faith and humility of the centurion and in his very words to profess our desire to receive the Lord Jesus.

As we celebrate this Eucharist today, let us be mindful that we have been called to the wedding banquet. Let us prepare to speak anew the words of our vows to Christ the King. And let us rejoice to hear the

words of promise of the Lord Jesus: *Come, you who are blessed by my Father. Inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world.*