

Homily based on the readings from September 18, 2023 (1 Timothy 2.1-8; Luke 7.1-10)

Many of you will remember that, back in November of 2011, the Church introduced a revised English translation of the Mass. One of the most noticeable changes pertains to a passage from today's Gospel. The old translation of the Mass included the prayer:

Lord, I am not worthy to receive you,
but only say the word and I shall be healed.

The current translation, to which most of us have become accustomed, says:

Lord, I am not worthy that you should enter under my roof,
but only say the word and my soul shall be healed.

Before I encountered the new translation, I do not think I even recognized the Scriptural reference. When we say this prayer, we are

essentially quoting the centurion from today's lesson, humbly asking for healing on behalf of his loyal servant.

There were several important reasons for this change. On a basic level, it fulfilled the Vatican's directive to translate the official Latin texts of the Mass "in the most exact manner, without omissions or additions in terms of their content." Beyond that, this change – and others like it – added a much clearer Biblical dimension to the Mass. The Mass has always included a rich Scriptural vocabulary, but many of the passages in the old translation were difficult to identify. To quote Arthur Roche, a bishop (now a cardinal) who was heavily involved in the translation process:

It was said of Saint Bernard that he knew the Sacred Scriptures so well that his language was biblical – he began to, as our young people would say today, "speak bible." ... [I]n using a translation that is more faithful to Sacred Scripture we are teaching ourselves and our people to speak bible!

There is another reason – a deeper reason – that it is essential for this particular passage to be translated in the way it is. As we all know, this prayer is part of the dialogue between the priest and the people shortly before we all receive Holy Communion. The priest’s prayer – “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” – is a composite of two Biblical passages, one from the Gospel of John and one from the Book of Revelation. The rest of us respond with this passage from the Gospel of Luke. In the context of the Mass, this is the moment we all recognize the presence of Christ among us – just as John the Baptist did at the River Jordan, just as the centurion did in Capernaum.

The point is that the Jesus of the Altar is *the same* as the Jesus of the Bible. The Eucharistic Christ is not distinct from the Scriptural Christ. The Jesus we receive today – Body, Blood, Soul, and Divinity – is identical to the Son of God whose life, death, and resurrection we read in the Bible and profess in the creeds.

If we were somehow given the ability to travel in time, most of us would want to go back to see Jesus with our own eyes, to hear him with our own ears. Although that would be an amazing experience, in a sense it would be superfluous. We encounter Jesus Christ every time we come to Mass – as we participate in the one sacrifice that was offered for all eternity at Calvary. It is fitting that we echo the humility of the centurion, because none of us is even remotely worthy to be in his presence – let alone to have him enter under our roof.