

Homily based on the readings from January 18, 2026 (Isaiah 49.3, 5-6; 1 Corinthians 1.1-3; John 1.29-34)

Most of us – at least those who are more than thirty years old – can probably remember when the English translation of the Mass was updated, back in November of 2011. Perhaps the most obvious difference is that we went from saying “And also with you” to “And with your spirit” – although there were quite a few other changes that took effect at the same time. For example, we started saying “I believe” rather than “We believe” at the beginning of the Nicene Creed.

Sometimes, particularly at Christmas and Easter, we can still hear echoes of the older responses coming from people in the pews.

As a brief aside, let me just mention that there is another translation project that is rapidly approaching its culmination. A new English version of the Bible, known as the *Catholic American Bible*, is scheduled to be published sometime in 2027, along with a corresponding lectionary – the book from which we read at Mass. These changes may

not be as noticeable as what we experienced in 2011, but they are certainly no less important.

One of the main benefits of our current Mass translation is that it enhances the *universality* of the Church's worship. By staying closer to the Latin original – which still remains the *official* version of the text – we are essentially saying the same prayers as our brothers and sisters who speak French or Spanish or Italian or Polish, or virtually any other language on the planet. There is a well-known saying that “the family that prays together stays together.” Exactly the same principle applies to the *worldwide* family of Catholic Christians.

There is no question, though, that the *most* important reason for updating the Mass translation was to make it more faithful to Holy Scripture. As you probably know, much of the language we say at Mass is taken directly from the Bible. Saint Paul, for example, concludes his Second Letter to Saint Timothy by declaring: “The Lord be with your spirit.” Not only is the current wording of the Mass more accurate, but it is also

more meaningful. Arthur Roche, an English archbishop who oversaw many aspects of the new translation, made the following observation at the time:

Saint Paul ... will often address a person, for example Timothy, by referring to “your spirit” rather than simply to “you.” What is the significance of this? Well, he is addressing someone close to God who has God’s spirit. So when we reply “and with your spirit” we are indicating that we are part of a spiritual community, it is God’s spirit that has gathered us together.

In other words, every time we speak the phrase “And with your spirit” – which happens at least *five* times at every Mass – we are actually making a statement about the fundamental nature of the Christian community.

There is another *exceptionally* important change that was made back in 2011, which directly relates to today’s Gospel reading. Just before we receive Holy Communion, the priest and the people engage in a brief dialogue. It used to begin “*This is the Lamb of God who takes away the*

*sins of the world.*” Now, as I am sure you all know, the wording goes as follows: “*Behold the Lamb of God, behold him who takes away the sins of the world.*” This difference, even though it is subtle, is still incredibly significant. The new translation makes it *unambiguously* clear that the priest is echoing the proclamation of John the Baptist. Just as John recognized the promised Messiah approaching him on the banks of the River Jordan, this is the moment when *we* recognize the presence of Jesus in *our* midst. The Christ who will appear on the altar in a few minutes, who is present in the tabernacle right now, is exactly the same Christ who appeared to John the Baptist two thousand years ago – the same Christ who has existed since before the beginning of time. In fact, that is *exactly* the reason why the language at Mass is so richly ornamented with Scripture. There is absolutely *no* distinction between the Jesus of the Bible and the Jesus of the Eucharist. They are one and the same – one Body, one Blood, one Soul, and one Divinity.

If I were somehow given access to a time machine – so I could travel to any point in human history – I would certainly attempt to witness some

of the milestones of Christ's earthly life: his Baptism in the Jordan, the Wedding Feast at Cana, the Sermon on the Mount, the Transfiguration, the Last Supper. Nevertheless, as wonderful as these experiences would be, at a fundamental level they are actually *unnecessary* – because of our ability to participate in the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass. The events of the New Testament may seem impossibly distant, but Christ is exactly the same – whether we meet him in [Groton/Ledyard] in 2026 or in the Holy Land two thousand years ago. Just like John the Baptist, we have *all* beheld the Lamb. Now it is *our* responsibility – and our privilege – to testify that he is, in fact, the Son of God.