

Catechesis on the Revised Mass Texts: HOLY, HOLY, HOLY

Every Sunday in the liturgy we sing ‘Holy, holy, holy Lord’, this first part of the Sanctus is adapted from a passage in the Old Testament where the prophet Isaiah in chapter 6 of the Book of Isaiah describes his encounter with the Holy One in a vision.

Here Isaiah approaches the sanctuary of the Temple in Jerusalem, which was also referred to as the Holy of holies, the most sacred area where the books of the Law were enshrined and believed to emanate the sacred presence of God.

In the vision Isaiah sees the throne of God surrounded by six-winged, ministering seraphim. The word seraphim means ‘burning ones’, later in the Christian tradition these celestial beings are described as burning with the excess of charity or the fire of God’s love.

Even today in Jewish synagogue worship this verse from Isaiah is sung by the congregation just before the opening of the scrolls of God’s word are brought from the ark – the holy space where God dwells: ‘*Kadosh Kadosh Kadosh Adonai Tz’vaot, Melo Kol Haaretz Kevodo!*’

In English this means ‘Holy, holy, holy, the Lord of Hosts, the entire world is filled with His Glory!’ This hymn of praise where we express our sense of wonder and awe in God’s presence was adopted by the Christian community who inherited many of the Jewish prayer patterns from synagogue worship.

The Latin text for this hymn is *Sanctus, Sanctus, Sanctus Dominus Deus Sabaoth*, so where we sang ‘God of power and might’ we will now be singing ‘Lord God of hosts’.

This new translation has a much closer affinity to the Isaiah passage. The hosts referred to are both in heaven and on earth. We believe that in heaven, the saints and angels worship God, but they do so in harmony with us here on earth.

So that all beings in heaven and on earth are joined together in wonder, awe and praise before God. We are part of a great host of those who serve God joined together in love and worship.

To remind us of this the priest ends the Preface with these words such as ‘And so with all the choirs of angels we sing your praise.’

Singing is the most appropriate way to pray this prayer as the music can also help us to get in touch with that sense of wonder and awe.

Not only is our worship united to this continuous heavenly praise but also to the most perfect act of worship possible – Jesus’ self offering to the Father, where the heart of the worship of heaven is Jesus’ sacrifice of praise.

In every single Mass we are united to this offering.

This week as you prepare for the introduction of the new mass texts you could reflect on the following:

- *What does the holiness of God mean to you?*
- *When have you ever had a sense of overwhelming wonder and awe in God’s presence?*
- *When you pray the ‘Holy, holy’ how do you feel drawn into the mystery of God’s presence?*
- *Do you ever have a sense that your prayer is united with the prayer of the angels and saints?*