

In the Name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

“THE LORD BE WITH YOU.”

(await response)

Yes! That's exactly what I hoped you'd say.

This ancient greeting, and its response, originate in pre-Christian times – it shows up in the book of Ruth, in Jerome's translation, as Boaz greets his reapers in the field with the words “*Dominus Vobiscum*” – that is, ***the Lord be with you***.

The response has always been a reciprocal one, variously translated – whether “and with your spirit,” or “and also with you,” or “and with THY spirit,” the greeting is always returned in kind. Many places in the Old and New Testament, we see variations on this theme – and by the time of the early Church, in the decades following Jesus' ministry, it became the primary liturgical greeting.

Our response to these words, after a while, becomes rather automatic. In fact, it is so good at getting Episcopalians to respond, that in seminary I noticed a trend toward shouting it into a room full of noisy people when you REALLY need to get their attention.

When not being used as an attention-getting device – perhaps not its highest use – it is the salutation used in worship to signal, to establish a movement toward a time of corporate prayer. We see this in two primary places in our standard weekly Eucharist – at the beginning of the first half of the service, the Liturgy of the Word of God, just before the Collect of the Day. And, then again, as we begin

our weekly celebration of Holy Communion -- it is the salutation again that begins the Eucharistic Prayer – the Great Thanksgiving.

The sentiment expressed in this simple and ancient salutation is really more than a greeting – it is a wish or intention that expresses the highest hope for the recipient: That the Lord's presence, God's peace, the Image of God, is alive and active in those to whom we express it. By this, we establish a holy relationship: recognizing God's presence, God's image, God's Spirit, in one another. This forms the foundation for corporate prayer – that we are in peace and charity with one another – and it is from this basis of right relationship that our prayer is offered. That is no small thing.

“LIFT UP YOUR HEARTS”

(await response)

“LET US GIVE THANKS TO THE LORD OUR GOD”

(await response)

We begin in relationship to one another, and then we turn our eyes toward God, as we “lift our hearts” to God. It is our greatest offering – ourselves – as we express this intention to offer our very lives. To me, the offering of our heart is to offer God our very being...everything we are, our highest hopes and aspirations, our dreams—the essence of who we are, given to God fully.

Once we have established these two relationships – the horizontal and then the vertical – the priest calls upon the people to “give thanks to the Lord our God.” Again, the response is affirmation – it is “right” – it is just – it is appropriate – that

we give thanks to God. Indeed, that's what it's all about – giving thanks. The very word “Eucharist” means “thanksgiving” – we gather, each week, sometimes more, to give thanks to God. It is the most important thing we do as a church – the primary responsibility of any parish church in our Communion is to offer the Eucharist – fundamentally, to praise and worship God. “It is right and a good and JOYFUL thing” – the Presbyterian book of worship says it thus: “it is our GREATEST JOY” to worship God, to offer our thanks. It is our duty, but it is also our

In today's Gospel reading, the ten lepers are all healed – Jesus sends them to the priests to follow their guidelines for cleansing. If you want to know the ordeal that they were about to endure, you can read all about it in Leviticus 14 – it's quite a lengthy description of purification rituals that these lepers would likely have been tasked with doing. So often in Jesus' stories, ten represents the many, and their responses or actions are contrasted with that of a single person – Jesus making the point that the right thing is often the uncommon thing.

The leper who thanked Jesus – the word used in the original Greek text is “*eucaristo*” – the same word for “Thanksgiving” that we echo here in our celebration of Holy Communion today – somehow, he was the one who responded in thanksgiving for his healing.

One commentator described it this way: The purpose and end of human existence is gratitude and praise not because of who human beings are, but because of who GOD IS. The God before whom humans live is a splendor beyond human

comprehension, to whom humans respond appropriately only in adoration and praise.”¹

And so, as we gather at this altar today, and as you stand to participate in this ancient dialogue, this thing we do TOGETHER – celebrating the Eucharist, the GREAT THANKSGIVING, I invite you to offer your heart – to lift everything you are, your hopes, dreams, highest aspirations, your successes and failures, your warts and all – and give the very fullness of your being to the One who created you. And, in so doing, give GREAT thanks, for all that God has done – is doing – and WILL DO – in our lives, and in this church!

In the Name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

¹ Stroup, George. *Before God*. Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2004, p. 24.