

What does the greeting “The Lord be with you” mean?

This is a common greeting found in scripture often used as a blessing for one about to begin a dangerous mission. In the Old Testament, David receives this blessing as he is about to fight Goliath; soldiers are blessed as they are about to go into battle; and the prophets used these words as they prophesied immanent doom. In the New Testament, it is a common ending to the letters encouraging the faithful to hold fast to their faith in spite of the dangers and persecutions they face.

This greeting is used not just once but four times throughout the Mass. Not only are we embarking on a dangerous mission, but a mission that becomes increasingly dangerous. Let us look at the 4 phases of Mass that begin with “The Lord be with you”.

Immediately following the sign of the cross, the priest opens Mass with a form of this greeting. He is invoking the Lord to be with us as we recall our sins and repent of them. Scripture and the catechism instruct us that if we are aware of serious sin we have committed, we cannot receive Holy Communion until we go to the Sacrament of confession.

The second time we receive the blessing is just before we hear the Gospel proclaimed. When we hear the gospel, it is Jesus, the Word of God, speaking to us. We should listen attentively. Even though we all hear the same words, God is speaking specifically to each one of us, giving us a message He intends us to act on.

The third time we hear the blessing is at the beginning of the Eucharistic prayer. The “danger” is almost at its peak. This is the final time of preparation before we actually receive the God of the universe as food we eat. Rash and foolhardy are we if we casually receive the Almighty God without preparation and a strong belief that what looks and tastes like bread is truly the body and blood of Christ.

We receive our last blessing just before we leave Mass. We are taking what we have learned and the body and blood of Christ we have received out into the world. In truth, this is the most dangerous mission of all. From Mass we receive the strength to live our faith in our daily life despite any oppositions and challenges we may face. Let us go boldly into our dangerous mission.