

Latin and Greek Phrases at Mass

We are often asked about those things that are sung in Latin during Mass. What do they mean? Why do we do them? And, what are the actual words?

Their meaning, in English, is found in the various missal books and pamphlets found in church. The problem is, because you are not yet thoroughly familiar with the Mass, you get confused. Hopefully, this will help you out of the dilemma.

First, why do we do this? The answer is in two parts:

- (1) Because we can. The words of the Mass can be said or sung in any language suitable for liturgical worship. Latin is the foundation language for ALL official documents of the Catholic Church.
- (2) Because our pastor, as leader of our parish community of worship, has said he wants it done this way. The basis for this decision is his sense that this adds dignity and beauty to such things as the proclamation of the Word of God during Mass.

Now, on to what you say and what it means at various times during Mass and during the liturgical year.

Penitential Rite

During the season of Lent (especially), during the penitential rite the English words, “Lord, have mercy!” and “Christ, have mercy!” are sung or said (in Greek, not Latin) as:

Kyrie, eleison and
Christe, eleison.

Phonetically, this is how they are pronounced:

“keer-ee-ay ay-lay-ee-sohn” and
“kree-stay ay-lay-ee-sohn”.

Word of God

After the first two readings at Sunday Mass, the reader chants “The Word of the Lord” in Latin. The Latin words are:

Verbum Domini.

This is pronounced as:

“ver-boom dough-me-knee.”

The people respond by chanting the same melody, “Thanks be to God,” in Latin. The Latin words are:

Deo gratias.

This is pronounced as:

“day-oh graht-see-ahs.”

After the Gospel, the deacon or priest chants *Verbum Domini* and the people respond:

Laus tibi Christe.

This is pronounced as:

“Louse (rhymes with house) tee-bee kree-stay.”

Holy, Holy, Holy

During the season of Lent, the “Holy, Holy, Holy Lord God of power and might, heaven and earth are full of your glory. Hosanna in the highest. Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord. Hosanna in the highest” is sung in Latin. The Latin words are:

Sanctus, sanctus, sanctus Dominus Deus Sabaoth. Pleni sunt celi, et terra gloria tua. Hosanna in excelsis. Benedictus qui venit in nomine Domini. Hosanna in excelsis.

This is pronounced as:

“Sahnk-toos, sahnk-toos sahnk-toos dough-mee-noos day-oos sah-bay-oat.

Play-knee soont chay-lee et tayr-ah, glow-ree-ah too-ah.

Hose-ah-nah een ayg-chell-sees.

Bay-nay-dick-toos kwee vay-knit een noh-me-nay dough-me-knee.

Hose-ah-nah een ayg-chell-sees.”

Lamb of God

During the season of Lent, the words, “Lamb of God, you take away the sins of the world, have mercy on us” are sung or said in Latin. This verse is repeated three or more times until the hosts are distributed among the various vessels to be used for distribution of Communion to the people. The last time, instead of “have mercy on us” it concludes, “grant us peace.” The Latin goes like this:

Agnus Dei, qui tollis peccata mundi: miserere nobis.

(repeats, until the last time:)

Agnus Dei, qui tollis peccata mundi: dona nobis pacem.

This is pronounced as:

“Ahg-noos day-ee, kwee toh-leese pay-kah-tah moon-dee: me-zay-ray-ray know-beese.

...

Ahg-noos day-ee, kwee toh-leese pay-kah-tah moon-dee: dough-nah know-beese pahch-em.”

Most Often Miss-Pronounced in English

Common mistakes are made by priests and deacons, as well as the people. Even an occasional bishop has been heard doing these. Heads up to the following:

During the Glory to God, note the phrase, “you take away the sin of the world...” The word, sin, is SINGULAR. Not “sins” but “sin.”

In contrast to the above, during the Lamb of God, the phrase is “you take away the sins of the world.” PLURAL, sins, not sin.

During the General Intercessions, the response to each petition is “Lord, hear our prayer.” SINGULAR prayer, not plural prayers. Together we are making one prayer, not a bunch of individual prayers.