

## Glory to God in the highest

Beginning the first Sunday in Advent (Nov. 27) a new translation of the Gloria will be introduced in all the masses. Here in this great song, the re-captured poetic style evokes in us a sense of God's greatness and our gratitude for God's presence and action among us. The revised version (with the new parts in bolded italics) goes like this:

Glory to God in the highest, *and on earth peace to people of good will.*  
*We praise you, we bless you, we adore you, we glorify you,*  
*we give you thanks for your great glory,*  
Lord God, heavenly King, *O God, almighty Father.*  
Lord Jesus Christ, *Only Begotten Son,*  
Lord God, Lamb of God, *Son of the Father,* you take away the *sins* of the world  
have mercy on us; *you take away the sins of the world, receive our prayers;*  
you are seated at the right hand of the Father, *have mercy on us.*  
For you alone are the Holy One, you alone are the Lord, you alone are the Most High,  
Jesus Christ, with the Holy Spirit, in the glory of God the Father. Amen.



The Gloria is a doxology that praises God the Father, through Jesus Christ, in the unity of the Holy Spirit. The precise origins of this hymn are unknown. The beginning verse, “*Glória in excélsis Deo...*” comes from Luke 2:14, when the angels greet the shepherds after the birth of Christ. The remainder of the hymn alludes to other scriptural texts, especially the Psalms.

The new translation of the Gloria is somewhat longer than the current one. The changes in words and word order express more literally

the sentiments and nuance of the Latin original – as is the overarching purpose of the new translation.

## People of Good Will

In the current version the opening line says “and peace to his people on earth.” Rather than describing to whom the people belong (to God), the new translation describes the quality of God's people (of good will). With the new translation, the question some will ask is whether the Lord offers tidings of peace to all people or only just to those of good will?

God the Father, through his Son, Jesus Christ, does indeed invite all people to receive the gift of peace. The Council Fathers defined true peace in *Gaudium et Spes*, saying: “Earthly peace results from the peace of Christ which radiates from God the Father... for by His Cross the incarnate Son, the Prince of Peace, reconciled all men with God... restoring all men to the unity of one people and one body” (GS 78). In other words, the peace offered is directly related to “reconciliation” – that is, the forgiveness of sin. It is therefore no coincidence that we recall the angels’ announcement immediately after our prayers for forgiveness (during the Penitential Rite) and the priestly prayer of absolution that followed. True peace, then, can exist as we become people of good will, that is, people united to God.

## **We praise you, we bless you, we adore you, we glorify you...**

Having just acknowledged our sins before God (Penitential Rite) and received the forgiveness and peace that comes from it, praise, blessing, adoration and glorifying seem the appropriate response. How do we do such things? Psalm 34 tells us: "I will bless the LORD at all times; his praise shall be always in my mouth. My soul will glory in the LORD; let the poor hear and be glad. O glorify the LORD with me; and let us exalt his name together." The words of the translation not only render the Latin more clearly, they also return us to the biblical exuberance of what it means to respond to God's mercy.

## **Sin or Sins? It's all in the details.**

The translators paid attention to detail. In the current translation of the Gloria, "*qui tollis peccata mundi*" is rendered, "you take away the sin of the world." The word "sin," which is plural in the Latin, was translated in the singular in English and takes on an abstract or generic meaning that doesn't capture the fullness of Christ's sacrifice. Christ poured out his blood "*for the forgiveness of sins*" (Mat 26:28), to take away the sin of Adam (Original Sin) and to take away individual sins, which rupture our relationship with God. "You take away the sins of the world..." in the new translation better expresses the nature of Christ's sacrifice both in general and specific (see Col 1:13).

## **Poetry and Technical Translation**

No doubt we will stumble a bit with the new translation of the Gloria, but this ancient and venerable prayer in its new translation does show the care and effort that went into the last ten years of effort by many thousands of people involved in the work. The work pays attention to details that make a difference and still renders the passion of joy at the realization of what God has done for us in Christ.