

SAID ED February 26, 2012

Salvation for "Many"?

Today we begin our Lenten Journey. From the earliest days, the followers of Christ have observed Lent as a time of penance and conversion. The early catechumens, wishing to become a full part of the communion of Saints, used the 40 days of Lent to prepare for the Easter Sacraments of Baptism, Confirmation and Holy Eucharist. The community of faith uses this time to renew our hearts as we support those also on the journey.

Lent is also a time of prayer. This year I am sitting with the new translations of Eucharistic Prayers of the Mass as part of my personal prayer. As you have no doubt noticed the priest presiders are still adjusting to the phrases of the prayers. By using these beautiful words in my prayer and meditation I hope to become better at presiding at Mass.

The new translation of the missal states in the consecration of the wine "which will be poured out for you and for many." The older translation stated "for all" at the same point in the narrative. I ask myself if we are becoming restrictive in our hope and desire for the salvation of all humankind? You may have noticed this as well.

To help understand this I turned my colleague and friend, Rev. Dr. George Heyman for assistance. Here's his scholarly and helpful response:

Our "new" translation reflects the literal translation of the Latin pro multis (for many). The Latin words used in the consecration reflect a combination of ALL the Gospel accounts. You can't find the "exact" words we use at Mass reflected in any of the Synoptic Gospels. With that said, Mark 14:23 indicates that Jesus sheds his blood for "all." He uses the Greek word (pántes) pávtes which clearly means that "everyone," would benefit and none would be excluded. However, Mark ends the statement there. It's only in Matthew's text that Jesus pours out his blood "for the forgiveness of sins."

This is where we find Matthew using a different word than Mark. Matthew uses the word (pollon) πολλῶν which can mean "many," however, notice that Matthew uses the genitive masculine plural. This is what we call a "semiticism," Matthew changes the Greek word used by Mark because he was writing for a particularly Jewish speaking audience who, hearing the Greek words of his text (as opposed to Mark's wording), would have made an immediate reference to the same action done (and the same words used) by the Suffering Servant in Isaiah 53:12.

If Matthew had used the word "MANY" in the singular, then yes, NOT all would be included, however, because Matthew uses the plural form of the word, the clear meaning (to a Greek speaking Jewish audience) is that EVERYONE (or all) are recipients of the forgiveness that Jesus embodies through the shedding of his blood. This "semiticism" (and the exact same Greek words) are found in the Septuagint (the Greek version of the Hebrew Scriptures) where the suffering servant of Isaiah 53 also offers his blood for "the many" (or, for all, everyone).

In short even though we say "many," the clear meaning (theologically and biblically) is that Jesus pours out his blood for ALL. Unfortunately this wonderful use of words and language is not immediately clear in English.

So there you have it! The new translation is not intended to be restrictive or to limit God's gracious

mercy and compassion in any way. I intend to be praying about this during Lent and I hope you will be doing the same as well.

Have a great First Week of Lent.
