

The Divine Service: Salutation

1st C.

P The Lord be with you.

2 Timothy 4:22

C And with thy spirit.

One of the tiniest parts of the Divine Service is also one of which we have the earliest evidence. In the Salutation's brief exchange between pastor and people, our faith speaks, which believes the promises of our Lord to be present where his people are gathered to hear his Word and eat his Supper.

The pastor says to the people the ancient greeting (Ruth 2:4; Judges 6:12), "The Lord be with you." This is not merely a greeting or pious wish, but a blessing, or a proclamation that the Lord is keeping the promises he made to come and save, to be our *Immanuel* (Matt 1:20–23). It is something like the synagogue greeting, "*Shalom alechum!*" or "Peace be with you," but the Lord himself is our peace, our Sabbath rest—and he is here with us! (John 20:19–20; Heb 4:9–16; Col 2:13–18)

Of course, with these words, "The Lord be with you," the angel Gabriel announced the imminent presence of the Lord Jesus to the Virgin Mary (Luke 1:26–28), and with similar words Paul blessed those to whom he wrote (2 Thess 3:16; 2 Tim 4:22). They take up Jesus' promises to be with his people as they receive his Word and his Supper. (Matt 26:26–29; 28:16–20) The pastor announces to the people that the Lord is present to save, and invokes God's present blessing upon them.

The people respond, "And with thy spirit." This is not quite the same as to say, "And also with you." It is not simply a reciprocal statement. The idea is that the Lord is not simply present in the pastor's person, but that the Lord is present by his Spirit, in the office vested in the pastor, to serve in Christ's stead and by his command. This response has therefore been called "the little ordination," the congregation acknowledging that the one who stands before them to offer their prayers, to speak to them God's Word, to feed them the Lord's Supper, is put there by God to do these things, and that through him God will keep his promises (Matt 28:18–20; John 20:20–23; 21:15–17; Luke 10:16; Mark 16:15–16; Acts 20:28; 1 Cor 4:1–2; 2 Tim 4:1–5). The 19th Century Lutheran pastor and liturgiologist Wilhem Löhe says that by the salutation, "the bonds of love and unity between pastor and people are tied anew" [Reed, 262]. God grant us so today!