

What Is The "Salutation"?

Day after day, we meet people at school, at work, at church, at the grocery store, and elsewhere who we know. When we see them, our typical salutation or greeting goes something like this: "Hi! How are you?" They usually respond by saying, "I am fine. How are you?" Sometimes that is all we say to each other before we go our separate ways. Other times we stop and talk a while longer. Just as we have a salutation we say to people, a Christian liturgical worship service does as well. In this column entitled, "Questions About Christianity", we are looking at the different parts of a basic Christian liturgical worship service. This month we will learn about the salutation by answering this question, "What is the "Salutation"?"

The Salutation is a greeting that has been widely used in the Christian Church ever since the 3^d-4th centuries A.D. It is often said before the Prayer of the Day and or at the beginning of the service of Holy Communion. There are two greetings typically used today. In the first greeting, the minister says to the congregation "The Lord be with you" and the congregation responds by saying to him, "And also with you". In the second greeting, the minister says to the congregation, "The Lord be with you" and the congregation responds by saying to him, "And with your spirit". However, many other Christian churches consider the Salutation to be the greeting said at the beginning of the worship service. The two greetings typically used are "In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit" and "The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ and the love of God and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you."

The reason for the different Salutations has to do with what happened in the early Christian church. In the early church, the worship service had two parts. They were a service of the Word and a service of the Sacrament. The service of the Word began with the Salutation where the minister said to the congregation, "The Lord be with you" and the congregation responded by saying to him, "And also with you". After the service of the Word a fellowship meal, which we call a potluck, was served. Visitors were not invited to the service of the Sacrament. It was only for those who were baptized and instructed in the church's teachings. However, already at St. Paul's time, the fellowship meal was causing problems in the churches (1 Corinthians 11:17-22). Eventually churches abolished the fellowship meal and joined the two services into one. Over time, many Christian Churches chose to replace the opening Salutation with the Invocation where the minister says, "In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit" or "The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ and the love of God and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you." The Salutation was moved in the worship service before the Prayer of the Day and or at the beginning of the service of Holy Communion. This was to indicate the two most important parts of the worship service, the Word and the Sacrament, are now about to begin.

When the minister says to the congregation "The Lord be with you", he is telling the congregation the Lord is with them during the worship service and with them in faith, which he will bless during the worship service. When the congregation responds with "And also with you", they are telling the minister the same thing. In worship services where the congregation responds with "And with your Spirit", some churches believe the congregation is saying to the minister the Holy Spirit is with him as he shares God's Word with the congregation, while other congregations believe they are saying something else. Regardless of where the Salutation is said in the worship service or which one is used, it is very comforting to know the Lord is with always with us and will bless us.