

A Simple Primer on Sacral English

At St. George Catholic Church, and throughout the Ordinariate of the Chair of St. Peter, we use a special type of English called “Sacral English.” It’s pronounce “SAH-*krell* English” in case you didn’t know. (The “a” is short, as in AH-*men*.) There is a very intentional reason why we used this form of English, which is briefly explained here. The purpose of this primer is not intended to be comprehensive. Rather, it’s designed to help regular people quickly pick up the basics of Sacral English, with the understanding that using Sacral English in worship, as well as reading it in literature, will help the user/reader gain a more comprehensive understanding on his/her own. We must all start somewhere, and usually the best place to begin is at the beginning.

LESSON ONE

What is Sacral English? Sacral English is a specialized form of the English language that was intentionally designed for use in religious settings. When we think of Sacral English, we often think of older versions of the Bible (King James Bible & Douay-Rheims Bible) as well as older versions of the Book of Common Prayer. Many assume that this is just how people spoke when these older books were written. However, that’s not entirely true. At the time these books were written (or translated into English), people didn’t speak this way at all. There were, of course, older ways to speak English, but Sacral English wasn’t one of them. So, if that’s the case, why was this form of English used? Why not use the newer, and more common, form of the English language? The answer is a bit shocking. Sacral English was designed this way specifically because it was (and remains) superior. That’s right, Sacral English is superior to all common forms of English, because it does something that common forms of English don’t do. It keeps track of who is speaking to whom, without the need to constantly remind the reader. Every sentence of the language does this. We see this done not only in ancient languages, but in some modern languages too. Unfortunately, common English isn’t one of them. So, when translating religious text, or writing religious prayers (particularly liturgy), the sacred (holy) form of English is used, and this is why it’s called “Sacral English.” It’s called that because it’s particularly used when dealing with sacred (holy) things. Granted, people use similar forms of it for poetry, song, and other artistic things. That’s all well and good, but it is used primarily for religion.

Rather than explaining this further, it’s probably better to just dig down into the language itself, and let the reader learn on his/her own once the basics are understood.

LESSON TWO

Second Person Singular

thou, thee, thy, thine

Thou is the second person singular when used as the *subject* of a sentence.

Thee is the second person singular when used as the *object* of a sentence.

Thy is the second person singular when used as the *subject possessively*.

Thine is the second person singular when used as the *object possessively*.

Second Person Plural

ye, you, your, yours

Ye is the second person plural when used as the *subject* of a sentence.

You is the second person plural when used as the *object* of a sentence.

Your is the second person plural when used as the *subject possessively*.

Yours is the second person plural when used as the *object possessively*.

So right from the start you can see two things. (1) Sacral English distinguishes the second person of every sentence as either singular or plural. (2) By dropping the Second Person Singular (thou, thee, thy & thine) from our vocabulary, Common English now has difficulty distinguishing whether the second person is singular or plural. We simply use “you” for everything now, singular or plural, and as a result we have to add more words to a sentence to make a distinction. Now, in Common English, if we are talking to more than one person, we can say “you” and hope everyone understands. Or we can say “you all.” If we live in the American South, however, we’re likely to use the contraction “y’all” instead. In the American North, and Western States, the term “you guys” is more popular, whether the people being addressed are male or female. Sacral English uses the archaic solution to this by having two completely different terms for Second Person Singular (thou, thee, thy & thine) and Second Person Plural (ye, you, your & yours). Since Hebrew and Greek also have different terms to make this distinction, we can begin to see why it would be important to use a form of English that does that too, especially when translating these ancient religious texts.

LESSON THREE

Verb Conjugations

-st, -th

I come.

Thou comest. | You comest.

He cometh. | She cometh. | They cometh.

English is a Germanic language with a dual Germanic & Latin vocabulary. (That’s why it seems we have two words for everything.) Very common to all Germanic languages, verbs are conjugated to determine who is doing the action. When the First Person (I or me) is doing the action, the verb remains unaltered. When a Second Person (singular or plural) is doing the action, the conjugation is **-st**. To help remember this, look at the “s” in **-st**, and think: “s” as in “second” or “second person.” When a Third Person (or persons) is doing the action, the conjugation is **-th**. To help remember this, look at the “t” or “th” in **-th**, and think: “th” as in “third” or “third person.” These conjugations help the reader know exactly who is doing the action.

LESSON FOUR

Fun Vocabulary Words

Sacral English has some fun vocabulary words that just aren’t in use anymore. They’re not difficult to understand, and they have some poetic value...

Hither—to or toward this place

Thither—to or toward that place

Whither—to what place or state

Some others are as follows...

Asunder—apart

Aye—yes

Behold—see or observe

Betwixt—between

Brimstone—sulphur
Fourscore—eighty
Hearken—listen
Host—an army
Laud—praise
Laver—a basin or similar container used for washing oneself
Magnify—glorify; extol
Meet—suitable or proper
Morrow—the following day
Nary—not a one; not at all
Naught—nothing
Nay—no
Nigh—nearly; almost
Quick—the living
Quickening — the first movement of a living child in the mother’s womb
Sepulture—burial
Sepulchre — grave; tomb
Smite—defeat; conquer
Suffer—endure; tolerate
Twixt—between
Yea — yes
Verily—truly; certainly; confidently
Yon—yonder; that over there; those over there
Yoke—the amount of land that one pair of oxen could plough in a day

Is it necessary to know all these fun words? No. Usually, one can figure them out based on the context in which they are used. It’s just nice to have a little introduction to them ahead of time.

CONCLUSION

You have now completed this Primer on Sacral English. From here you’ll have enough to figure the rest out on your own, and you shouldn’t need any more instruction unless you just want to dig further into it. Attached below is a PDF file of this page, which you can download and print out if you’re so inclined...