



## FR. DANIEL'S CORNER

Mass Moment: Part 22

### SANCTUS: HOLY, HOLY, HOLY

*"Holy, holy, holy, Lord God of Hosts, heaven and earth are full of your glory. Hosanna in the highest. Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord. Hosanna in the highest."*

With the unending hymn of praise, *Holy, Holy, Holy*, the gathered assembly is brought up into the heavenly liturgy where our voices join innumerable angels and saints in the glorious act of praise. The text of the *Sanctus* is scripturally based. The first line is the hymn of the seraphim in Isaiah 6:3 and Revelation 4:8. The second part is what the crowd cried to Jesus at his triumphal entry into Jerusalem (Mt 21:9), which is modeled after Psalm 118:25. According to Edward Sri, the three-fold repetition of Holy, Holy, Holy, is the strongest form of the superlative in the Hebrew language. Therefore, the seraphim worshipping God "acclaim the Lord as the all holy one, the one God above all other gods. And by singing 'the earth is full of your glory,' they praise God for His splendor, which is displayed throughout creation" (A Biblical Walk Through the Mass, 103). Interestingly, the angels and the twenty-four elders who sit on twenty-four thrones in heaven, found in the above referenced passages in Isaiah and Revelation, all fall prostrate before the majesty of God. This is the same reason, as we conclude the *Sanctus*, we fall on our knees in the presence of His Divine Majesty.

*Hosanna* is a Hebrew term derived from the words *yasha*, which means "save," and *na*, which is an expression of entreaty or request and can be translated in a variety of ways— for example, "I pray," "I beseech," "please," or "O." The Hebrew terms were combined – *yasha na* ("O, save!"), as in Psalm 118:25— which became the *hosanna*. It was used as part of the Jewish temple liturgy during the feast of Tabernacles, when the priests carried willow branches and cried "Hosanna!" while processing around the altar of burnt offering. Over time, the crowd that gathered to worship picked it up and it became a cry of joy. The seventh day of Tabernacles even came to be called "Hosanna Day."

*Hosanna* also reminds us of how the crowd greeted the Messiah by waving palm branches and joyfully crying "Hosanna!" to him as he entered Jerusalem. By this time, the term may have lost some of its original meaning and may have been mostly an acclamation of joy and petition (as it is now during Mass). Yet it still carried the air of a joyful petition for deliverance. Furthermore, the expression "Hosanna to the Son of David!" was an exhortation to acclaim or praise the Messiah in hopes of deliverance (probably from the hated Romans in the mind of the crowd).

The expression "Hosanna in the highest!" is more mysterious. Suggestions have included the idea that it is an exhortation for us to cry "Hosanna!" to God, that it is an exhortation for the angels to cry "Hosanna!" to God, and that it is an exhortation for there to be songs of praise in heaven. There is even the suggestion that the phrase means "Up with your branches!" (on the unlikely supposition that the branches carried during the feast of Tabernacles had come to be called "hosannas").

Historically, "Hosanna" was used as part of the Mass in the first century. The *Didache* (A.D. 70) (The teaching of the Lord through the twelve apostles) includes the acclamation "Hosanna to the God of David!" in the congregation's responses during the prayer of thanksgiving after Communion.

*And that is your Mass Moment for the week.*