

An Explanation of the Revisions of the Daily Prayer of the Order

The Daily Prayer of the Order of Malta was rewritten through a collaboration among the three US Associations – the result was a common prayer that all those associated with the Order in the USA can say each day. During the 2019 annual pilgrimage to Lourdes, the presidents of the three US Associations agreed on this new version and prayed it together at the Grotto in Lourdes, All prior attempts at reaching such an agreement in the previous years had been unsuccessful.



DAILY PRAYER OF THE ORDER OF MALTA

Lord Jesus, thou hast seen fit to enlist me for thy service in the Order of St. John of Jerusalem. I humbly entreat Thee, through the intercession of the most holy Virgin of Philermo, of St. John the Baptist, Blessed Gerard, and all the saints, to keep me faithful to the traditions of our Order:

Be it mine to practice and defend the Catholic, the Apostolic, the Roman faith against sacrilege. Be it mine to practice charity towards my neighbors, especially the poor and sick. Give me the strength I need, to carry out this my resolve, forgetful of myself, learning ever from Thy Holy Gospel a spirit of deep and generous Christian devotion, striving ever to promote God’s Glory, the world’s peace, and all that may benefit the Order of St. John of Jerusalem.

Amen.

There were only a few changes, each of which is explained here:

- Knights and Dames are not specifically mentioned because this prayer is designed for Knights, Dames, Auxiliary, Volunteers *and* Malades. Each of us has been called in a different way by Our Lord to serve the poor and sick with the Order.
- There are many versions of the word, “Philermo,” – what is important is that all three Associations have agreed to use the same version.
- The term, “enemies of Religion,” has been replaced by “sacrilege.” “Religion” referred to the Order and “enemies” referred to those with whom the Order was fighting. Modern translations of this term in other languages refer to impiety, the condition of being sacrilegious. We are called to defend the Church against unholiness, from whatever source.

What follows is a more extensive explanation of the use of the word "sacrilege" in place of "enemies of religion," provided by Frá James-Michael von Stroebel from the Federal Association:

A sticking point was in reaching agreement on a correct translation of the meaning and intent of the phrase, "*adversus impietatem strenue defendam*". After considerable discussion and consideration of a variety of words, agreement was reached on the use of the phrase "**defend against sacrilege**".

It was well understood that the members would need some explanation, since the normal 'every-day' meaning of that word appears inadequate to convey the deep and full intention of the Latin form of the Prayer. So, what is needed is a fuller explanation of the meaning of the word "sacrilege". And that requires a clearer explanation of the Latin "*impietatem*", which needs the explanation of several other English words.

The Latin Phrase in the Daily Prayer

Religionem catholicam, apostolicam, Romanam firmiter colam ac adversus impietatem strenue defendam.

This sentence in the Prayer has two part, governed by the words "*colam*" and "*impietatem*".

firmiter colam:

The verb is *colere*, which originally referred to agriculture and meant to cultivate, till, tend, and care for. By extension when applied to a quality, a study or a way of life, it may mean to take care of, to foster, to attend to; applied to a study it may mean to practice; applied to a deity it may mean to honor or to worship.

adversus impietatem strenue defendam.

Adversus: an adverb/preposition meaning 'opposition', 'oppose';

Impietatem: a noun meaning disregard of obligation, undutiful, disloyal, and with regard to a god it may mean impious;

Strenue: promptly actively, vigorously, strenuously or resolutely;

Defendam: may mean to repel, repulse, ward off, drive away, or defend.

In the Latin version, the words 'enemies of religion' do not appear. The Latin words for 'enemy' were '*inimicus*' [a person] or '*hostis*' [a group such as an army]. In the Latin version of the prayer, a word equivalent to the English word 'enemy' does not appear. The closest is in the word "*adversus*" which more closely means opponent (such as in a legal action) more than enemy.

So, in modern English, it could be translated in a wide variety of ways, such as:

“May I firmly practice the Catholic, the Apostolic, the Roman faith and resolutely

- (a) defend it against all attacks.**
- (b) bear witness against its opponents.**
- (c) defend it against impious opposition.”**

Profane: serving to debase or defile what is holy. **Profanation:** the act of profaning.
Impious: not pious, irreverent, profane. **Impiety:** the quality or state of being impious.

The Word “Sacrilege”

The violation or profanation of anyone or anything sacred or held sacred.

As languages developed – and continue developing – words often take on new or additional meanings even to the point of seemingly to mean the opposite of their original meaning. An example is the word “terrible”. The modern understanding is “exciting terror” but it also has meant and means: awesome, imposing, extreme, great, or even of poor quality. So “Ivan the Terrible” originally meant “Ivan the Great”.

And so it is with the word “sacrilege”. Over years of use and misunderstood use, its full meaning has been eclipsed by a general acceptance of a much weaker meaning, usually identified as an inappropriate meaning of descripted language.

But the true meaning of the word is very serious and very encompassing. It covers any violation or harm or intended violation or harm by act or withholding of act or by word toward anyone or anything sacred or held sacred. That would include acts of prejudice. Clearly an attempt on the life of a Pope would be a sacrilege, but also would be article or play spreading false information about the Catholic Church.

What is required is not a better word, but a better understanding of the true and full meaning of the word “sacrilege”.

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