

By Father Charles Bowes

Isaiah 55:6-9
Psalm 145:2-3, 8-9, 17-18
Philippians 1:20-24, 27
Matthew 20:1-16

We dare to say amen.

Four-letter words can get you in trouble. Your mother probably taught you that when you were very young. In the liturgy, we frequently use a four-letter word, and it can get us in trouble too. It's a word that we adopted directly from the Hebrew language. The word is Amen.

If you ask most people how to translate Amen, they will say it means "So be it." That is a valid definition. Amen is a word that expresses our assent to what has preceded it.

Think of all the times we say Amen during Mass. At the beginning, we say Amen to the sign of the cross. We agree that we are worshipping in the name of the Trinity. We say Amen to several shorter prayers during the Mass: the concluding prayer in the penitential rite, the opening prayer of the Mass, the concluding prayer of the General Intercessions, the prayer over the gifts and the prayer after communion. In all of these, our Amen makes the prayers our own, affirming what has been spoken in our name. We say Amen at the end of the Glory to God and the Profession of Faith. With these two Amens, we express our agreement with the praise offered to God and the faith that we share.

Our most significant Amens, however, come at the end of the Eucharistic Prayer and at the reception of Communion. In different ways, these Amens express our willingness to join ourselves with Christ and embrace his sacrifice.

At the end of the Eucharistic Prayer, we generally sing the Great Amen three times. This Amen says that we accept and affirm all that has been proclaimed in the prayer, especially the paschal mystery, the death and resurrection of Christ.

Scholars tell us that the root word in early Hebrew from which Amen comes means "to pound in one's tent stake." If you remember what that early Hebrew means when our ancestors in the faith were wandering in the desert, and if you know that you do not live long in the desert without a tent to shield you from the heat of the midday sun and from the cold of the desert night, then this phrase sounds a lot like our expression, "I'd stake my life on it."

That is the deeper meaning of Amen. When we sing Amen at the end of the Eucharistic Prayer, we proclaim that we will stake our life on the paschal mystery, that we believe we too share Christ's saving passage through death to life and are willing to die ourselves in order to rise to that new life, that we will accept whatever comes from following the Father's will as Jesus did.

At Communion, we say Amen when we receive the body and blood of the Lord. This is more than agreeing that the bread and wine are Christ's body and blood. We accept the body of Christ broken for us and the blood of Christ poured out for us. We recognize that we are part of the body of Christ who shares this communion together. We express our willingness to be the body of Christ in the world today and to pour out our lives for the sake of others.

So be careful when you say Amen. This four-letter word can get us into trouble because of what it requires of us.

Even so, we dare to say Amen.