



CE2: Happy New Liturgical Year!

Introduction

Hello, and a very warm welcome to the second episode of the Catholic English Podcast, where you can learn English with the saints. I'm your host, Henry, and I'm very happy to be here with you again.

Thank you very much to everyone who has been in touch, for all your kind comments and encouragement. Thanks in particular to Michał, Piotr, Józek and Darek.

If you've already listened to the first episode, you'll have an idea of what to expect. If you haven't listened to the first episode, it does contain lots of useful information about how we're going to work together to learn English, learn about the saints, and hopefully learn some things that are useful to us in our lives. My basic responsibility is to provide interesting material, and your responsibility is to listen, read and engage with the material.

You can find all this on our website www.catholicenglish.org where you can also sign up to receive email updates and find other courses that I provide.

My apologies to those of you who are waiting for the promised podcast on St Ignatius of Loyola – I'm working on it, and it should be released on time as promised next Sunday (according to my two weekly schedule.)

One very good question I've been asked is about the level of these podcasts. If you feel like you're a beginner, or if you feel that the podcasts are too difficult for you at the moment – DON'T STOP LISTENING. When I was a beginner in Polish, I started listening to a podcast like this, and I could hardly understand. In fact, I could just understand enough to know that it was interesting material. This meant that I had to listen again and again, and gradually I understood more and more.

There's a danger that if we decide to believe that we're beginners, then we can get stuck in the boring beginner material and make progress very slowly. If you can manage to keep on listening to these podcasts, it may seem very difficult at the start, but I promise you will make progress.

There is another answer to the beginner question. I am slowly beginning to make a separate course for beginners, with short stories and questions and answers. You will see parts of this course appearing on my website www.catholicenglish.org as I prepare it, and today I want to share with you the first lesson of one of these courses.

Happy New Liturgical Year!

First of all though, I want to wish you a Happy New Year. Today is the first Sunday of Advent, which is the beginning of the Church's year.

Advent is a time of waiting, waiting for the amazing good news of Christmas, that our Saviour has been born. It is also a time of preparation, of prayer, of cleansing (making pure).



Before we go to Mass, we make sure that we're clean and ready, in body and spirit. We prepare, we put on our Sunday clothes, we might fast (not eat). We want to take our best selves to church, to the Holy Sacrament, to our physical meeting with the real living Christ, our eating of the bread of life.

Since Christmas is such a holy day, we spend three and a half weeks in this preparation and purification.

Of course in the world today it doesn't always appear this way. Certainly when I lived in the UK advent was a time of office parties, shopping and fake happiness which, for the majority of the population doesn't include going to church, and often does include disappointment, depression and arguments between family members.

I'm very blessed to now live in Poland, where most people (at least in the countryside where I live) still hold on to the Catholic traditions. Many of my neighbours still remember advent as a time of fasting, and they still avoid alcohol and parties during the season of advent. Christmas trees go up on Christmas Eve (the evening before Christmas day), and houses are thoroughly cleaned as well as souls purified. Christmas is a time for church and family, and presents are modest and mainly only given to children (at least in my experience).

And if advent is a time of preparation and purification, it's also a time of beginning and renewal. If we *renew* something, it means we make it new again. Sometimes after years of marriage, couples decide to *renew their wedding vows*, to go to church and to make their wedding promises to each other again.

And just as married couples renew their commitment to each other, the Church hopes that in the time of advent, we will be inspired to renew our commitment to our faith. As we wait and watch for the coming of our Lord, we must remain *attentive*, so that we can see or hear the signs of his presence and his will in our lives, and we must try anew to be *responsible* to those signs.

Now is the time that the Church, in her liturgy, encourages us to 'wake up' – 'It is now time... to put on the armour of light, ... to lay aside the works of darkness...' (Romans 13: 10-12)

My wake up call

I must admit that I am quite new to being a Catholic, and I'm still trying to catch up with many things. I also worship in Polish, and I know from experience how hard it can be to hear and understand the details of the readings and homilies (although I hope in some way that my heart catches more than my ears). I'm also still struggling to fully understand the liturgy, despite listening to a couple of books on the subject. I know that liturgy basically means *public worship*, but it's still hard to catch all the subtleties of it.

So it was partly a surprise for me when I was reminded that now it's the New Year.

This is often how learning works. When we first 'learn' something, in reality it's more like we have 'become aware' of it, but that awareness can quickly and easily fade from our consciousness. When we come across the same thing again, later, we might recognise it (or remember it) or we might not. Sometimes we need to meet a fact or an idea several times before we begin to remember it, and we only really learn it when it becomes important to us.



That's why we need to have so much repetition in religion and language learning, because we only half learn things most of the time, and we constantly need to build up on the fragments to create something that we can make practical use of.

Anyway, it's new year, time for new beginnings, time to start the new liturgy – aha! Things are coming together. Messages are being sent my way, and I'm beginning to see the links, to understand – to **be intelligent** in Lonergan's words. Now I have to be reasonable (make decisions) and be responsible (take action).

It came to me, that this is the solution I've been seeking. This is the help I've been asking for.

I already had a model for a course that I wanted to create, but I haven't had the material to put in it. I'm very clear about the next ten podcasts, but the beginners' course...???

Now I know. The material should be the readings for the liturgical year, and now is the time to start. This is the Catholic English website after all, and if you're trying to learn English there's a good chance that you'll be attending Mass in English, and you might need help to understand the readings. Also, the readings are often quite short, so they are appropriate for beginner lessons (easier than these long podcasts at least.)

The model is not my invention. Other people use this approach, including Piotr from www.realpolish.pl. I believe there are also English courses available, although I don't know where. I had begun by trying to think of all the useful verbs and vocabulary that beginners need for everyday communication, and then I was going to write 50 short stories using all these verbs and vocabulary, but that's a big project that I can't manage along with everything else at the moment. It seems to me that the solution I've been given is the best approach, and fits in with the wider charism, style and concerns of Catholic English.

Today I want to share with you the first fruits of my inspiration. Included in this podcast is the first beginners lesson.

The format of the beginner lessons is as follows:

1. A very short introduction
2. A short text (a reading, or an extract of a reading)
3. Some explanation of the text
4. Interactive questions and answers based on the text. These deepen understanding of how the language works, and encourage and support speaking.
5. The text from a different point of view (if it fits the text).
6. A short conclusion

So let's dive in...



BCE1: First Sunday of Advent

Introduction

Hello and welcome to the first lesson in the Beginning Catholic English (BCE) course. In this course we'll be using the weekly readings from the Catholic Mass. We'll learn the vocabulary and how to understand the texts.

The best way to learn is to read and listen at the same time. You can see the text on the website, or download and print the pdf file.

The first Sunday in Advent is the Church's Liturgical New Year, and a good time to start new things.

The reading

The second reading for the first Sunday of Advent (Year A). First I will read the whole text, then we'll look at it again, more slowly and carefully.

it is now the moment for you to wake from sleep.

For salvation is nearer to us now than when we became believers;¹²the night is far gone, the day is near.

Let us then lay aside the works of darkness and put on the armour of light;¹³let us live honourably as in the day, not in revelling and drunkenness, not in debauchery and licentiousness, not in quarrelling and jealousy.

¹⁴Instead, put on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make no provision for the flesh, to gratify its desires.

(Romans 13:11-14)

Some explanation

'it is now the moment for you to wake from sleep.'

In simple everyday language: 'It's time to wake up.'

It's now the moment, it's now the time, to wake up. You've had enough sleep, it's time to wake up.

In modern everyday language we use the phrasal¹ verb *to wake up*. The verb '*to wake*' is used in more poetic senses, or in older texts.

For salvation is nearer to us now than when we became believers;

Salvation is the *state* of being saved or rescued from danger, evil or sin.

¹ A phrasal verb is a verb made up of two or more words, for example *to wake up*, *to get up*, *to go out*. They're all based on a root verb, such as *to get* or *to go*, but they have very different meanings, for example *to get up* often means to get out of bed, but *to get down* usually means to return to the ground from a high place.



Water for example has three *states*: the solid state (ice), the liquid state (water) and the gaseous or gas state (steam).

People can be in various states: we could be in a state of sin, a state of depression, a state of prayerful contemplation, and eventually, we hope and believe, a state of salvation (in heaven).

Believers are people who believe in God, in Jesus Christ, and in the teachings of the Church. We *became* believers when we chose or decided to believe.

‘salvation is nearer to us now than when we became believers’ means that we are making progress. We’re getting closer to salvation.

The word ‘for’ at the beginning of this line indicates, shows, that it is a *reason*. The fact that salvation is getting closer to us is *why we should, is the reason for*, waking from sleep.

the night is far gone, the day is near.

The night here means darkness, sin, confusion, ignorance; the day is light, truth, salvation.

‘far gone’ means that it has gone far away. This is an old or poetic usage. Nowadays we more commonly say ‘long gone.’ For example, ‘My days of partying are long gone’ means I used to go to parties a long time ago, but not much now.

Let us then lay aside the works of darkness and put on the armour of light

To *lay aside* means to put down on the side, to stop holding, stop using, stop touching something. We could say ‘*lay aside* your weapons (and stop fighting)’ or ‘*lay aside* your tools (and stop working).’ To *lay aside* is also an old form of English. We can’t really say ‘*Lay aside* your phones,’ but we would more likely say ‘*Put down* your phones.’

Armour was made of metal and used to be worn to go to battle. If someone hit you with a sword, hopefully your armour would protect you. Armour is not a weapon to attack, but a defence. The works of darkness are like weapons that need to be laid aside (past tense), put down, but the armour of light should be put on (like we put on a coat to protect us from the wind) as a defence, to protect us.

let us live honourably as in the day, not in revelling and drunkenness, not in debauchery and licentiousness, not in quarrelling and jealousy.

If we live *honourably* it means we live well, we live a good life. We have nothing to be embarrassed or ashamed about. People will usually say good things about us.

Revelling = partying;

drunkenness = the state of being drunk = having drunk too much alcohol;

debauchery = behaviour involving too much sex, drugs or alcohol;

licentiousness = immoral sexual behaviour;

quarrelling = arguing

jealousy = wanting to keep or protect something that you have because it makes you feel proud.

Instead, put on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make no provision for the flesh, to gratify its desires.



Instead means ‘in place of,’ or ‘rather than.’ For example, ‘drink water instead of wine.’

Don’t do those silly things, ‘put on the Lord Jesus Christ’ which is the same as ‘put on the armour of light.’

If you make a provision for something, that means you prepare for it, give it something, allow it.

The flesh is what St Paul called the world of sin, confusion, darkness. This world fills us with desires, and somehow wants us to support it, to help it to continue to exist, to make provision for it.

To gratify a desire is to give it (the desire) what it wants. For example a desire for wine. We could resist the desire and drink water, or we can gratify it and drink wine.

If we feel in ourselves the desires of the flesh, we should try to resist them, we should try not to gratify them. This is very difficult, and we need help from our Lord Jesus Christ, we need to pray for him to give us his armour, his strength, his defences from these worldly desires.

Questions and answers

This is a very good and effective way to learn English and to practice speaking.

I will read short sections of the text, and then ask simple questions. The answers all come from the text itself, or from the explanation given above. You will soon see what I mean.

Try to answer the questions out loud if you can – that’s the best way to learn. I’ll give you a little space to answer the question, then I’ll answer. You can read the answers from your screen or from paper (download and print the pdf file.)

If you don’t feel confident to speak out loud yet, that’s ok. Listen to the questions and answers and read them at the same time. Pay attention to how the language works, how the words change around when we ask questions.

Let’s try, and see how you do. Just do what you can. Maybe say a quick prayer to ask for help first if you feel like you need it...

it is now the moment for you to wake from sleep.

Q: What is it the moment for you to do?

A: To wake from sleep. It is the moment for me to wake from sleep.

Q: When should I wake from sleep?

A: Now. I should wake from sleep now. Now is the moment I should wake from sleep.

For salvation is nearer to us now than when we became believers;

Q: Is salvation closer to us now or further away?

A: It’s closer to us. Nearer and closer mean the same thing.



Q: At the time we became believers, was salvation closer to us or further away?

A: At the time we became believers means when we became believers, so salvation is closer to us.

the night is far gone, the day is near.

Q: Is it still night?

A: No, the night is far gone, it finished a long time ago.

Q: What is near?

A: The day is near.

Q: Does this mean that, before we were believers we were living in the night of confusion, but now the day of truth and light are nearer?

A: Yes, exactly. Before we were believers, we lived in the night of confusion, but we are getting nearer to the truth and the light.

Let us then lay aside the works of darkness and put on the armour of light;

Q: Should we move away from the works of darkness?

A: Yes, we should lay them aside, which means leave them, move away from them.

Q: Should we get dressed in the armour of light?

A: Yes, we should put on the armour of light, like we put on a coat – in other words, get dressed.

let us live honourably as in the day, not in revelling and drunkenness, not in debauchery and licentiousness, not in quarrelling and jealousy.

Q: Should we live good lives, so that people say good things about us?

A: Yes, we should live honourably, so we are not ashamed of our lives, and people will tend to say good things about us.

Instead, put on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make no provision for the flesh, to gratify its desires.

Q: Should we gratify the desires of the flesh?

A: No. We shouldn't *gratify* the desires of the flesh, we should resist those desires. We should *make no provision for* the flesh, give it nothing.

A different Point of View

How does the text change if we read it *as if we're telling someone what St Paul wrote*²? Let's see.

St Paul said that it was then the moment for us to wake from sleep.

He said that salvation was nearer to us then than when we had become believers;¹² the night was far gone, the day was near, he said.

² Note that theologically, this doesn't work. For example the moment for us to wake from sleep is always the eternal now, not the historical *then*. This exercise is just to help us understand English and how it works as a language.



He told us to lay aside the works of darkness and to put on the armour of light; and that we should live honourably as in the day, not in revelling and drunkenness, not in debauchery and licentiousness, not in quarrelling and jealousy.

¹⁴Instead, he told us to put on the Lord Jesus Christ, and to make no provision for the flesh, to gratify its desires.

Compare this text, the so called ‘reported speech’ version, to the original.

If you know a bit of grammar you’ll see that the *present simple* changes to the *past simple*, and *now* changes to *then*:

It *is* now the moment => It *was* then the moment
salvation *is* nearer to us now => salvation *was* nearer to us then

Similarly, the *past simple* tense ‘when we *became* believers’ changes to *past perfect* ‘when we *had become* believers.’

In the last two sentences there are *imperatives* (like Lonergan’s imperatives from the first podcast: *be attentive* [see!]; *be intelligent* [think!]; etc.). How do these imperatives change. I think we have two options. Here is one original line and the two options:

Let us then lay aside the works of darkness and put on the armour of light
He told us *to lay* aside the works of darkness and *to put* on the armour of light
He said *we should* lay aside the works of darkness and *we should* put on the armour of light

I won’t comment here on the reasons; I don’t want to make things too difficult. It’s enough to see the examples for now.

Conclusion

Congratulations to all of you who have managed to stay listening to the end. I encourage you to listen again, to read the transcript which is available for free on the website www.catholicenglish.org, especially to listen and read at the same time if possible, to make notes, to speak out loud if you can when answering the questions.

I hope that this was helpful for you. Please comment on this post or send me a message using the contact form on the website.

You’re learning English, and I’m learning how to provide this material, and your comments and suggestions are always helpful for me. For example, maybe I shouldn’t talk so much about grammar.

I’m your servant. I rely on you being happy with the material I offer, so that I can continue to do this work and get it out to more people who need it.

Next week I’ll release the podcast about St Ignatius of Loyola, and how his life and his writings can help us to learn English and other useful lessons in our life.

For now, thank you very much for your help, goodbye, and God bless.