

We Dare To Say "Amen"

Four-letter words can get you in trouble. Your mother probably taught you this 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 how to translate "*Amen*," the most basic meaning and valid definition is "*So be it*." "*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 act of penitence, the opening prayer of the Mass, the concluding prayer of the universal prayers, the prayer over the gifts and the prayer after communion. In all these, our "*Amen*" makes the prayers our own, affirming what has been spoken in our name. We also 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 "*Amen*," however, comes 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*" is derived meant "to pound in one's tent stake." Recall that when the Hebrew people were wandering in the desert, a tent was necessary to shield them from the heat of the midday sun and from the cold of the desert night. Thus this phrase and meaning sounds a lot

like our expression "*I'd stake my life on it*."

When we sing "*Amen*" at the end of the Eucharistic Prayer, we are proclaiming that we will stake our life on the Paschal Mystery, that we are willing to die to self in order to rise to new life, and that we will accept whatever comes from following the Father's will as Jesus did.

Likewise at Communion, we say "*Amen*" when we receive the Body and Blood of the Lord. This response means more than agreeing that the bread and wine are Christ's Body and Blood. By saying "*Amen*," 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 share this communion together. We express our willingness to become the Body of Christ in the world today; to pour out our lives for the sake of others. Thus the only proper response to the reception of Holy Communion is always AMEN! However, be careful when you say it. This four letter word can get you in trouble because of what it requires of you.