

LATIN LESSON TWO

Good Morning ! Last week we learned about Latin nouns in the first declension. Remember “puella” ? Let me remind you ~ here are the “inflections” for the first declension:

Case	Singular	Plural
Nominative	puella	puellae
Genitive	puellae	puellarum
Dative	puellae	puellis
Accusative	puellam	puellas
Ablative	puella	puellis

Note that some of the cases share the same inflections. For example, genitive singular, dative singular and nominative plural are all “puellae”. You have to rely on context to know which case the author intends.

Let’s add the second and third declensions. Here are the inflections for “amicus” (friend), a typical second declension noun:

Case	Singular	Plural
Nominative	amicus (friend)	amici (friends)
Genitive	amici (of the friend)	amicorum (of the friends)
Dative	amico (to the friend)	amicis (to the friends)
Accusative	amicum (friend)	amicos (friends)
Ablative	amico (by/with the friend)	amicis (by/with the friends)

Third declension nouns come in various forms, but in the main they follow the same pattern of inflections. Here are the inflections for the third declension noun “homo” (man, in the sense of “human” ~ a human male is “vir”, and a woman is “mulier”):

Case	Singular	Plural
Nominative	homo (man)	homines (men)
Genitive	hominis (of the man)	hominum (of the men)
Dative	homini (to the man)	hominibus (to the men)
Accusative	hominem (man)	homines (men)
Ablative	homine (by/with the man)	hominibus (by/with the men)

With “homo”, we see the application of a very important rule of Latin word formation: The inflected word endings are added to the “stem” of the word, which is derived from the genitive singular form of the word. The stem of “homo” is not “hom”, but “homin”.

Now that we have learned the first three Latin declensions (just two more to come!), let's try our hand at translating a very familiar phrase which we say at Mass on Sunday (except not during Lent or Advent). Here are the Latin words with interlinear English translation:

"Gloria in excelsis Deo, et in terra pax hominibus bonae voluntatis."

Glory on high God and on earth peace to men of good will

Now, for the grammar:

"Gloria" is a first declension noun in the nominative case.

"In" is a preposition which can mean "in", "on", "into" or "among", depending on context.

Where it means "in" or "on", as here, the noun following it is in the ablative case.

Where it means "into", the following noun is in the accusative case.

"Excelsis" comes from the second declension noun "excelsum", meaning a high or lofty place. It gives us the opportunity to talk about the "gender" of Latin words. In English, gender is easy: Male things are masculine, female things are feminine, things which are neither masculine or feminine are neuter. But Latin is like French: all words have a specific gender, and things that are not obviously masculine or feminine may still be of the masculine or feminine gender.

"Excelsum" is a second declension neuter noun. Declension of neuter nouns varies in one important respect from other nouns: the forms for nominative and accusative are always the same. Hence, excelsum is declined thus:

Case	Singular	Plural
Nominative	excelsum	excelsa
Genitive	excelsi	excelsorum
Dative	excelso	excelsis
Accusative	excelsum	excelsa
Ablative	excelso	excelsis

"Excelsis" following "in" means "in the high places" or "on high".

"Deo" comes from "Deus" (God), a second declension noun.

"Deo" is in the Dative case ~ glory is given "to God".

"et" = and

"Terra" is a first declension noun meaning "earth". We know it is in the ablative case, not the nominative case, because it follows "in" ~ hence, "on earth"

"Pax" is a third declension noun, meaning "peace". The genitive singular is "pacis", so it is from the stem "pac-" that the word is declined.

“Hominibus” ~ also a third declension noun. Since we just declined the word “homo” (man), we know “hominibus” is either dative (“to men”) or ablative (“by/with men”). From the context we understand that peace is being given “to men”, hence “hominibus” is the dative plural.

“Bonae” is an adjective meaning “good.” Adjectives, like nouns, are declined, and they agree in gender and number with the nouns they modify. “Bona” is the feminine form, and it is declined like a first declension noun (i.e., like “puella”). “Bonus” is the masculine form, and it is declined like a second declension noun (i.e., like “amicus”). “Bonum” is the neuter form, and it is declined like a second declension neuter noun (i.e., like “excelsum”).

Before we decide what form “bonae” is, we have to look at the noun it modifies.

“Voluntatis” comes from “voluntas”, a third declension noun meaning “will”. “Voluntas” is declined in the singular like “homo”, thus:

Case	Singular
Nominative	voluntas
Genitive	voluntatis (Nota bene: from the genitive singular comes the stem)
Dative	voluntati
Accusative	voluntatem
Ablative	voluntate

So, now we can see that “bonae” and “voluntatis” are both genitive singular, hence: “of good will”

So, there you have it ! Isn't Latin fun ?

Pax (!) James