

Reading Middle English: Answer Key for Instructors

Notes on the first transcript

Also a preest þouʒ he be

Instructor: note the thorn and yogh, the “tall lower-case s”, the irregular spelling of preest (to us), the r formed with using the side of the p.

Try the next three lines:

Synful and oute of charite
He is goddes ministre and holy chirches
(next page) þat þe sacrament of þe autere Worches

Instructor: note the abbreviation for “r” and a vowel that the scribe expects the reader to fill in.

Transcription

...þe sacrament þat is so holy
May noght apaired be þoruʒ his foly
þan may þe masse soules fro helle brynge
Alle þouʒ a synful preest hit synge
For in goddes name he synges þe messe
Undre whome in order he es
Bot special preyers with good entent
þat ben made bysyde þe sacrament
Of a good preest ben wel bettere
þan of an yuele and to god swettere
Bot þe offrynge of goddes body
Helpiþ the soules principally
Where it semep þat messe syngyng
May most þe soules oute of peyne brynge.

Translation

The sacrament that is so holy
may not be spoiled through his folly
so that the mass may bring* souls from hell
Although a sinful priest sings it
For he sings the mass in God’s name
Under whose orders he is [ie, who he serves]
But special prayers with good intent
that are made in addition to the sacrament
by a good priest are much better
than an evil one’s, and sweeter to God
But the offering of God’s body
Helps the souls principally
Wherefore it seems that the mass-singing
May save the most souls from pain [in hell].

*save

Instructor: If you have read more passages from the Book of Margery Kempe, you might discuss this episode in comparison with of Margery’s narrated conflicts with clergy and laymen as they seek to quiet her or challenge her. Alternatively you could use it as a bridge between this discussion of this passage and the next (when Margery goes to Norwich and sees a pietà) featuring two good priests at the beginning, and one bad “uncharitable” one at the end.