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Remembering the Lira

Michael Sean Winters | Jul. 16, 2010 Distinctly Catholic

NPR?s ?Morning Edition? had a great segment today [1]on the Euro and efforts to unite Europe more generally. It noted that national traditions persist, but that the economies that use the Euro are now so intertwined, there is no going back. The issues engaged are profound and, as is typical of NPR, well considered in the segment.

But, my memory registered a less profound complaint against the Euro. It used to be so much fun buying things in Italy because the Lira was denominated in such a crazy way. Roasted lamb at a restaurant was 45,000 Lire. A new leather jacket was 2 million Lire. The difficulty in figuring out how to translate the price was hugely and happily off-set by the thrill of ordering something that cost 2 million of anything.

I recall an evening in Rome. I had hosted a dinner party for half a dozen American clergy studying at the Casa Santa Maria. We dined at da Sostegno, a nice little restaurant down the street from the Capranica. I was then a successful small businessman not an impoverished writer, so I treated. After dinner, we walked over to Giolitti?s for gelato. One of the clerics treated. At the gelaterias of Rome back then, one scoop cost 1,000 Lire. I had three scoops. When I got my gelato, I turned to the priest who was treating and gave the standard ?thank you? in Italian: ?Mille Grazie.? He rejoined, ?Tre Mille Grazie.? Not sure if the humor of his comment survives the march of time, but I can remember it more than ten years later as if it was yesterday. I miss the Lira.

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Links:
[1] http://www.npr.org/templates/story/story.php?storyId=128517958