

LANGUAGE CORNER: Ask George! November 2008.

November 22nd.

Now that I have left the stand in the safe, competent, and efficient hands of Merville, I can sit back and think of words again—the word **kermesse** in particular. It is not at all common in English, and most Monaco newcomers almost always had asked me what it meant exactly. The simple answer is ‘a jumble sale’. And ecumenical? That was a much harder one!!!!

KERMESSE comes in fact from Flemish and Dutch: it is a compound made up of kirk and missa. It means? Nothing less than “church service”. Coleridge and the English Ballads and Robert Burns and Scottish and Celtic make frequent use of kirk. And missa is pure Latin: Missa Solemnis in classical music: Beethoven 1823, to be precise; “solemn mass”.

As to oecumenicus, or ecumenicus, is Late Latin and Late Greek... Closely connected with IKEA that everybody knows as a Swedish-furniture mega-shop. Though oikos means ‘house’ in Greek. And the whole compound means **1.** world-wide; **2.** the whole of a body of churches; and **3.** worldwide Christian unity. In a word, as many churches as possible—a bunch of them.

So, when all is said and done, ecumenical kermesse means **Church + Church + home + service**....with a touch of worldwide Beethoven to it. (The National Anthem of the European Union!) That’s all. Oh, I forget: *La truculente kermesse* is a most famous painting by Rubens. You’ll find all this and much more in the Book Stands, French & English. Do not make the mistake of missing them!
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