

## **THE PARTS OF THE MASS**

### **Part One : The Introductory Rites**

“The way we gather demonstrates the reasons we have come together at all.”

- The *General Instruction on the Roman Missal* tells us that the purpose of the Introductory Rites **“is to ensure that the faithful who come together as one establish communion and dispose themselves to listen properly to God’s word and to celebrate the Eucharist faithfully”** [#46].
- This means that we cannot just hurriedly come to Mass without any preparation and expect the Mass to accomplish in us what it could accomplish in us.
- So we need to gather well, purposefully, and with enough time to dispose our minds and hearts to what is going to happen in the Mass. This is why we need to reverence the tabernacle before we come into this space as a sign that we recognize that Christ is already here and that what we do in here is a response to what Christ is always trying to do in us and with us.
- Then when we enter:
  1. We bless ourselves with the holy water from the font as a renewal of our baptism and a recognition that through baptism we have entered the church – the People of God.
  2. We profoundly bow to the altar; we do not genuflect. We only genuflect to a tabernacle and the Cross on Good Friday but not to an altar.
  3. We sit quietly for several moments gathering up our worries and concerns, our joys and gritudes and we surrender them to God in silent prayer. In other words, we bring our true lives to the Eucharist.
- When Mass begins, we stand and sing together for the Entrance Procession. The song and procession capture the journey that all of us have made to this place. Furthermore, they signify that each individual “I” is now becoming a “we”. We are in this together because only together are we the Body of Christ.
- Next we make the sign of the Cross which reminds us of our baptism and it reminds us that the God we believe in is a Trinity of Persons, that is, a Community of Persons. Therefore, it is only when we are a community of persons bonded to each other that we truly reflect the image and likeness of God.
- This is followed by the priest’s greeting which always comes from one of the letters of St. Paul. For instance, “The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God, and the communion of the Holy Spirit be with all of you” comes from the end of Paul’s 2<sup>nd</sup> Letter to the Corinthians. Again, this is a reminder that God is a communion of persons and the Holy Spirit draws us into communion (or unity) with God and with each other.
- You have been used to responding to the priest’s greeting with “And also with you.” Now you will respond with “And with your spirit.” This new response will also be made at the 4 other points in the Mass where the people used to say “And also with you.” There is a linguistic reason and a theological reason for this change:

- a. Linguistically, “And with your spirit” is a more exact translation of the Latin “*Et cum spiritu tuo.*” By correctly expressing this dialogue in English, we are actually aligning our translation with that of all the other major language groups, which have long been translating the Latin properly.
  - b. Theologically, you are actually offering your prayers for the priest and his ministry. We believe that through Holy Orders, Christ has forever configured the priest’s spirit to himself in a special way, by the power of the Holy Spirit. By saying “And with your spirit,” you are blessing the transformation in the priest and giving strength to his ministry.
- Next is the Penitential Act in which we recognize our need for God’s mercy and we profess our belief in God’s love for us. This is why we confidently acknowledge our sinfulness and ask God to forgive us. The Penitential Act is actually a statement of belief that God’s love is always more powerful than our sins. We will hear stronger language in the Confiteor, which we sometimes pray during Lent. It will now include the lines “***I confess to almighty God and to you, my brothers and sisters, that I have greatly sinned in my thoughts and in my words, in what I have done and in what I have failed to do, through my fault, through my fault, through my most grievous fault....***”
  - The other option we most often use is when the priest invokes Christ’s mercy and the people respond “Lord, have mercy” then “Christ, have mercy” and then “Lord, have mercy” again. This is known as the *Kyrie eleison*, which is Greek for “Lord, have mercy.”
  - After this, the priest invokes God’s mercy upon all who are present.
  - Then, outside of Advent and Lent, we sing the *Gloria*. It continues our praise of the Trinity, with each line taken from either the Old Testament or the New Testament. Remember, the whole point of the Eucharist – the Mass – is to offer praise and thanks to God. The *Gloria* helps to put us into the right spirit of the liturgy.
  - The Introductory Rites end with the Opening Prayer. When the priest says, “let us pray” we stand in a moment of silence, once again recalling the prayers, the needs, and the life situations that we are bringing to this Eucharist to surrender to God. Then the priest, on everyone’s behalf, prays to the Father, through the Son, and in union with the Holy Spirit. You will notice that the language of these prayers is going to sound a lot more formal and stylized in tone. Again, this is meant to reflect a more exact translation of the Latin originals and to capture a more elevated form of English reserved for such a sacred event as the Mass. The language of these prayers is not supposed to sound like the language we use every day, much like the language of great speeches by historical figures does not sound like conversational English.