

Gathered for Worship

This week we continue our series in looking at the Mass, the central prayer of the Church. First, the word "Mass" is the English rendering of the Latin term "*missa*." In Latin, the Mass ends with "*Ite missa est*" or "Go, it is sent." The Church, after celebrating and making present the sacrifice of Christ, is "sent" to proclaim and live the Good News! After receiving Jesus, we are sent to bring Jesus to others.

However, we are getting ahead of ourselves. Let's look at the introductory rites, which include the **Entrance, Sign of the Cross, Greeting, Penitential Act, Gloria, and Opening Collect** (prayer).

Mass begins with a processional chant or hymn. This should not be overlooked! A procession signifies that as a pilgrim people, we are traveling somewhere. God has a purpose for our lives. He created us out of love and *for* love (i.e., for Himself). The Cross bearer (notice the Cross leads!), servers, lector(s), deacon, and priest process in song. In other words, as pilgrims, we are guided together in joy.

If there is a tabernacle behind the altar, you will notice that the deacon and priest genuflect at the base of the altar. St. Paul reminds the Philippians, "*At the name of Jesus, every knee shall bend of those in heaven and on earth and under the earth.*" (Phil 2:10) The deacon and priest then go behind the altar and reverence (i.e., kiss) it. Given that the altar symbolizes Christ, this gesture symbolizes our love for and unity with Christ.

Once the deacon and priest reach the chair, the priest makes the sign of the Cross. Again, don't overlook this important sign! We sign ourselves "In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit." It's the Trinity who blesses and protects us. And it's done in the form of the Cross, our salvation. By beginning Mass with this gesture, we invite God more deeply into our lives and invoke His divine presence and power.

Never rush when making the sign of the Cross! I remember praying with an elderly lady after I returned to the faith. I made the sign of the Cross without thinking about it. However, she made the sign of the Cross ever so slowly, "In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit." I was like, "Wow. She's actually praying with her heart."

Next, the priest greets the people. This is far more significant than, "Good morning everyone." Instead, the priest says, "The Lord be with you." The priest prays that the divine life received in baptism continues to grow in you. In the Sacred Scripture, whenever the Lord sent an angel on a special mission, oftentimes the angel would greet the person with, "The Lord is with you" (e.g., Gideon, Moses, Mary, etc.). In other words, the Lord has a mission for you!

The faithful respond, "And with your spirit." The faithful acknowledge the Holy Spirit who makes possible the priest's ability to celebrate the Mass. There is only one priest, Jesus Himself, but each priest acts in Christ's name and by His power. Essentially, the faithful are saying, "Perform your sacred duties well!"

Then comes the Penitential Act. The priest and faithful are about to do something extremely holy: Worship God. However, before doing so in truth, they must acknowledge their sins. Therefore, the priest and faithful say the *Confiteor* (Latin meaning "I confess") thereby humbly admitting their faults in their *thoughts, words, and deeds*. They confess their omissions as well: *and what I have failed to do*. We begin Mass, then, in truth by acknowledging our need for God's mercy.

After acknowledging our sins, we turn to praise God's goodness and thank Him in the *Gloria*. The beginning of the Gloria takes us back to Bethlehem, where the angels announced to the shepherds the good news of Christ's birth: "*Glory to God in the highest and on earth peace to those on whom his favor rests*." (Lk 2:14) Moreover, the Gloria follows a Trinitarian pattern. We first address the almighty Father, then His Son (and His work of salvation), and acknowledge the Holy Spirit. It is a beautiful prayer of praise to the Trinity.

Finally, the priest invites the people to pray a prayer known as the *Collect*. This prayer "collects" or gathers all the intentions of the faithful participating in the Mass. The priest begins the prayer by saying or singing, "Let us pray." He then waits for a moment, allowing the faithful to gather up their hearts. The prepositions are noteworthy in this prayer. It is addressed "to" the Father, "through" Christ His Son, and "in" the unity of the Holy Spirit. It concludes "one God, for ever and ever." In short, we acknowledge the Trinity is three Persons, but only one God.

Next week we will take a commercial break to talk about our patron Saint Thérèse for her feast day. Once we resume, we will look at the Liturgy of the Word, where God speaks to us today.

Goldy at the Penitential Act



Goldy at the Gloria

