



TEACHING MASS - BULLETIN INSERT
INTRODUCTORY RITES:
“OUR ENTRANCE INTO MASS, OUR ENTRANCE INTO HEAVEN”
SUNDAY, JANUARY 15, 2023



GATHERING TOGETHER

Before we even begin the Mass, worship takes place from the moment we choose to come to Mass. We prepare ourselves by setting aside the business of our life and instead focus on God and the marvelous event about to take place. We dress in our Sunday best, just as the priest vests for Mass, and enter the Church in a spirit of prayer as we prepare ourselves to meet the Lord in His word and body. Just as the priest prepares for Mass, we prepare our hearts as well. For we are all part of the same celebration.



PROCESSION

At the beginning of Sunday Mass, before the priest begins the celebration, he makes a symbolic journey from the entrance of the church to the sanctuary, then kisses the Altar. This action is a sign of the priest’s unity with us, who have traveled from home and entered the church from outside, a journey each of us makes. The priest does not enter into the church or the sanctuary alone, but is accompanied by those who assist him in his celebration of the Mass as the Mass is not a private affair. These ministers enter the church led by an image of Christ crucified, signifying how Christ leads His pilgrim people from the world into heaven, which is signified by the Altar.

As the priest processes through the church to the Altar, he walks past people in the pews, signifying that even as the priest is set apart for certain sacred functions, he too is part of the people of God. He is one of us, coming from among our own ranks before stepping up to the Altar as the Celebrant of the Mass. The priest kisses the Altar as he arrives, signifying not only reverence for this sacred table, but also how the words uttered by his lips are words of worship and praise.

SIGN OF THE CROSS

The Mass, like all prayers, begins with the Sign of the Cross. In this, we recall how Jesus used the cross as the tool of our salvation. As we sign ourselves, the priest says the words, “In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit.” When we invoke the Holy Trinity during the sign of the cross, we recall our baptism, in which the same words were said by the priest as he poured water over our heads, cleansing us from Original Sin and making us members of the family of God.

These words are rightly used to begin our sacred liturgy because of the power of the God who is Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Since ancient times in royal courts, whenever important business was conducted or some proclamation read, the president of the assembly would say, “In the name of the King!” In the same way, we invoke the name of our God in His Divine Persons as a symbol of recognition that our worship is focused on Him and we are gathered in His name, for His sake.

WORDS OF GREETING

We all know the exchange, “The Lord be with you,” with the people responding, “and with your spirit.” We say this several times throughout the Mass. Even from the first greeting, whether it be these exact words or other forms of greeting, they are not merely poetic words of welcome. These words are a spiritual exchange, not between priest and people, but between Christ and His Church. From the moment the priest enters the church, his words and actions are not his own. The priest takes on the role of Christ in the assembly, acting as the Head of the Church while we are the body. This is why the people respond, “and with your spirit,” rather than, “and also

with you.” In mentioning the spirit, we acknowledge the dynamic that the priest is both his own person and the *in persona Christi*, the person of Christ within the priest as he celebrates the Mass. This idea of Christ being active in our liturgy through the priest is a repeated key point that we return to throughout the Mass.



PENITENTIAL ACT

Immediately after the priest and people exchange the sacred greeting, they turn together to the Lord in repentance. This is usually done by everyone while praying together the Confiteor (“I confess to Almighty God...”) and invoking the Kyrie (“Lord, have mercy”). There is an option, often used during the Easter season, to have the priest sprinkle holy water over the people in remembrance of our baptism and the cleansing power of God’s forgiveness.

In all of this, we are acknowledging our sins and our need for God’s mercy. This part of the Mass is a summary of the pursuit of our earthly life: coming to God like the prodigal son and receiving His mercy and love. Just as Christ tells us to make peace with our brother before entering the temple, we make peace with God. We should clarify that serious sins require the Sacrament of Confession for forgiveness, but small (venial) sins can be forgiven by these penitential acts, which we pray at every Mass. In the Old Testament, priests would ritually purify themselves before offering the Old Covenant sacrifices. In the New Covenant, it is right that we spiritually purify ourselves through prayer before offering our own sacrifice of praise.

THE GLORIA

Once we have received God’s mercy, we immediately respond with that ancient hymn of praise, the Gloria. This hymn, sung on most Sundays and other Solemnities (High Feasts), comes to us from the nativity of our Lord, when angels appeared to shepherds singing the glory of God. They sang to announce that Christ had come. In this same way, we sing the Gloria to recognize that Christ is present with us at Mass, through our gathering together, through the priest, through the Word, and most of all, through the Eucharist. We proclaim with great joy the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, made present again and again at the Mass.

It is worth clarifying that we do not always sing this hymn. We do not sing the Gloria during Advent and Lent because during those seasons there is a greater focus on penance and mercy. By contrast, Easter, Christmas, and other Sundays are most appropriate occasions to praise God for His glory. It is appropriate that the Gloria take place directly after the Penitential Acts, acting as a joyous response to the forgiveness from God that we have just received.

THE COLLECT: THE OPENING PRAYER

After the Gloria (or the Penitential Acts, if there is no Gloria), the priest invites the entire community to pray as one by the call, “Let Us Pray.” This call, used since the earliest days of the Church, calls the community to enter into the mysteries about to happen. The priest extends his hands outward, a sign that he is speaking to God on behalf of all of us, and he prays the Collect, the opening prayer that is proper to this day. He alone says the words, but we are called to bind our thoughts to those words and to be united in this prayer, our hearts being gathered (or *collected*, one might say) into the arms of the priest as he brings them to God.



The Collect gives us a kind of theme of this particular Mass, like a first look at the readings of this Mass, or the particular reason for this Mass. The Collect acts as the main point of the beginning phase of the Mass. The parts before this prayer were inviting us into the Mass. The Collect then brings us into the heavenly sanctuary where we offer ourselves, our presence, and our intentions to God. Entering into this liturgy, God invites us to listen to Him in the Liturgy of the Word.