

Script – Episode 2 – The Introductory Rites

The church announces the approaching time of Mass by ringing the church bell, calling and gathering the faithful from their homes and activities of the week into one place on the Lord's day.

Upon entering the church, our immediate focus should be on the tabernacle which houses the Blessed Sacrament - the Real Presence of Jesus Christ. We dip our fingers in holy water and draw it over our body as we make the Sign of the Cross. This action reminds us of our baptism, which forever marked us as belonging to Christ. It renews our commitment to Him and we should do it with great reverence and gratitude.

We genuflect toward our King in the tabernacle as a sign of adoration and honour before entering a pew. This gesture, done with sincerity and reverence, should immediately help us to be mindful that we are in the Presence of God. We should try to be early for Mass so that we will have time to collect ourselves, to spend some quiet time in prayer and to empty our hearts to God.

The procession, the entry of the priest, lectors and altar servers in an orderly fashion to the sanctuary symbolizes our earthly pilgrimage toward heaven. We are a pilgrim people and we are making our way through life to God. But we do not travel alone. We move through life as a family and that family is the Catholic Church.

At the head of the procession is the crucifer, an altar server bearing a cross. It reminds us that Jesus is our "leader to salvation ... made perfect through suffering" (Heb 2:10). We stand to sing the opening hymn together to intensify our unity and as the procession moves, we inwardly and spiritually, are also hastening to heaven, behind our leader who goes before us: Jesus Christ, crucified, risen and glorified.

When the procession reaches the sanctuary, the priest gives a profound bow to the altar, then approaches and kisses it as an expression of veneration. The altar is given such honour in the liturgy as it represents the sacrifice of Christ.

The celebration of the Mass begins with the Church's most basic blessing and most fundamental prayer: the Sign of the Cross. This seemingly simple gesture summarises the core doctrines of Christianity. It proclaims the Trinity of persons in the Godhead: Father, Son and Holy Spirit. By the form of the cross, we also acknowledge the means of our redemption: the cross of Calvary, whose sacrifice is made present for us in the Mass. Jesus Christ willingly underwent the humiliating death on the cross for our sake. We have been redeemed through the events that happened on one cross two thousand years ago. The sign of the

cross is our reminder of the extent of our Lord's love for us which we should remember and rejoice as we begin the celebration.

While signing ourselves, we solemnly call on name of the Trinitarian God to invoke his divine presence and power. We are consecrating the next hour or so of our lives to the Lord and everything we do in the Mass - our thoughts, desires, prayers and actions - we do in this name.

The priest follows with a simple greeting drawn from Scripture. "The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the communion of the Holy Spirit be with you all" (2 Cor 13:13).

Taken from St Paul's second letter to the Corinthians where he prays that grace, love and communion be given by the Trinitarian God to the whole congregation that St Paul addresses, we pray that these same gifts of the Christian life are also given to us for the sake of our unity and salvation.

When we respond with "And with your Spirit", we are acknowledging the role of the Holy Spirit in the Mass. We are addressing Jesus Christ, who is the true priest presiding over every Mass.

We come to Mass because we have been called by Christ. Yet we know we have not always been faithful to our calling and that we have not always lived up to the teaching of Jesus Christ. We are not without sins.

The Penitential Rite gives us a chance to recognise our failings and ask God to cleanse us of all that might hold us back from this great celebration. As we acknowledge our sins, we take full responsibility. I have sinned through "my fault" - not someone else's. We confess our sins not only "to Almighty God" but also "to you my brothers and sisters" to highlight that our sins not only affect our relationship to God but also our relationship with each other. We do not simply and at time even absent-mindedly utter an apology to God but we should express our heartfelt contrition and humbly admit that we have sinned "through my fault, through my fault, through my most grievous fault."

The Penitential Rite is our chance to receive the grace from Jesus and to rise again with Him to the life of virtue. Once we have repented, like the prodigal son in the parable, we have made our move toward our Father, who is hurrying now to meet us.

The priest concludes the rite by offering a prayer of absolution for the congregation. Our faith teaches us that this action will indeed remove the stain of any sins that are not mortal sins. Bowing our heads as the priest says this prayer is one way to accept the mercy of God that is given by the Church through the merits of Jesus Christ. Let's open our heart to this great gift.

If in the Penitential Rite we acknowledge our lowliness and express our need for salvation and God's mercy, in the very next prayer, the Gloria, we joyfully praise God's greatness.

Its opening lines are taken from the Angels' song at the birth of Jesus for as God came to the world in the baby Jesus some 2000 years ago, so He is made present sacramentally upon our altars at the consecration in every Mass.

By recounting who God is in the Gloria, then what He has done for us in taking away our sins in Jesus, and finally declaring again that He alone is God, we are making a proclamation that God is our God!

We should reflect on the meaning of this prayer in our lives. Do we place God first? Do we reflect the glory of God in our lives? Do others sense the Presence of God when we pray to God?

As we raise our minds and hearts to God in this prayer of praise, we should recognise that God has not abandoned us in our need but is now in our midst. We should open our hearts to Him and ask Him to make us aware of His Presence in our lives at every moment.

The priest then offers the invitation, "Let us pray", followed by a moment of silence. The silent pause invites each one of us to offer private prayer, either to call our petitions to mind or a silent moment contemplating the presence of God.

The priest then concludes this moment of silent prayer with the "Collect" whose purpose is to collect all the individual prayers into one brief, focused prayer. Through the voice of the priest, we humbly direct our petitions to God. The prayer reflects the fact that Christian worship is always offered to God through Jesus Christ and in the power of the Holy Spirit. Our prayer, as individuals and as the Church, has value only to the extent that it is united to Christ's own prayer and self-offering to His heavenly Father.

We respond to the prayer offered by the priest with our own "Amen". This is the first of several Amens in the liturgy and an important part of our participation in the Mass by which we offer our collective agreement, consent and commitment. Amen is from a Hebrew root and may be translated as "Truly", or "Yes, indeed". We should listen attentively to the opening prayer and make it our own and affirm this prayer in our heart as we proclaim "Amen" with those around us.

This concludes the Introductory Rites. We may have come to Mass unsettled or distracted but the Introductory Rites now bring us into God's presence with ears open to listen to God's words and hearts open to participate in the saving sacrifice of Christ.

As we move to the next part of the Mass - the Liturgy of the Word - we pray in our hearts, "Speak, LORD, your servant is listening." (1 Sam 3:9)