

## **Why We Do What We Do**

### **II: The Introductory Rites.**

*“The rites preceding the Liturgy of the Word, namely the Entrance, Greeting, Act of Penitence, Kyrie, Gloria, and collect, have the character of a beginning, introduction, and preparation. Their purpose 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 worthily.”*

(General Instruction of the Roman Missal)

In last week’s column, I began reflecting on the various parts of the Mass and considering why we do what we do. This week, the reflection is about the Introductory Rites, which can often be so familiar that we tend to overlook them. But they are important rites because they help us to come together as one body, one spirit in Christ, and they prepare us for what will follow.

We begin with the entrance procession. This procession, like all the processions that we have at Mass, is not just a way of getting from one place to another. Processions remind us that we are a people on the move. Our true home is not here: we were made for heaven, and it is the great project of our lives to get there. The entrance procession symbolizes that journey that we all must make, from where we are, closer to our God who made us for himself.

Next, the priest reverence the altar by bowing, or in our case (since the Tabernacle is in the Sanctuary) genuflecting, and then the priest (and deacon, if there is one) kiss the altar itself to express veneration for Christ present on the Altar of Sacrifice. We then stand in our places and make the sign of the Cross, remembering our God who brings us together, and the saving sacrifice which makes us one. Then, in a continued act of veneration, the priest greets the gathered people of God, among whom Christ is also present.

In order to prepare ourselves for the Mass, we next call to mind our sins, followed by an act of penitence - I confess...” The “Lord have mercy/Christ have mercy” follows, recognizing that our sins can only be removed by the saving action of our Savior’s mercy.

The priest then pronounces the words of absolution, which, however, lacks the effectiveness of the Sacrament of Penance.

We next sing the Gloria, a very ancient and venerable hymn in which the Church, gathered together in the Holy Spirit, glorifies and entreats God the Father and the Lamb. This hymn is sung on Sundays outside of Lent and Advent, as well as on solemnities and feasts.

Finally, we conclude the introductory rites with the Collect prayer. The priest begins by inviting all to pray, after which a moment of silence is observed so that we all might “be conscious of the fact that we are in God’s presence and may formulate our petitions mentally.” Then the priest prays the prayer of the day. At the conclusion of the prayer, the people make the prayer their own with the acclamation, “Amen.”

Thus we come together, and prepared now for the sacred mysteries, we hear the Word of God. But more on that next week!