

The Introductory Rites of the Mass

Over the course of the next few articles, we will describe the various parts of the Mass to make sure we understand their purpose and our role as conscious and active participants in this Sacred Liturgy.

The purpose of the Introductory Rites is "...that the faithful who come together as one establish communion and dispose themselves to listen properly to God's word and to celebrate Eucharist worthily" (GIRM #46). So all that comes before the Liturgy of the Word is intended to help us gather as a community and prepare to celebrate the Sacred Mysteries.

So how do you gather yourself and your family and prepare for Mass? Some read and reflect on the scriptures of the Mass before they arrive. Others refrain from TV or radio on Sunday morning. Others get everybody up early so that there is no rushing or last minute crises to worry about. Do you prepare to arrive early, not just on time, or so late that there is no time to become one with the community and prepare for Mass?

When you arrive at Church, how do you begin becoming a community in Christ? Do you acknowledge the presence of Christ in one another by greeting each other in the parking lot and the gathering space? Do you acknowledge Christ in those around you as you are seated? Do you participate in the song practice so that you are prepared to actively participate in the liturgy?

When you enter the worship space do you acknowledge the presence of Christ by genuflecting to his presence in the tabernacle if the tabernacle is present in

the sanctuary or profoundly bowing (bowing from the waist) to his presence symbolized in the altar if the tabernacle is not present? How we gather before Mass prepares us for what is to come.

When the entrance procession begins, we stand and join in prayerful song. The purpose of singing at this time "...is to open the celebration, foster the unity of those who have been gathered, introduce their thoughts to the mystery of the liturgical season or festivity, and accompany the procession of the priest and ministers" (GIRM #47).

Once we are unified in song, we affirm our unity in Christ by signing ourselves with his cross. After the liturgical greeting of the presider, we are either called to remember God's mercy through an act of penitence or to remember our baptism in Christ through the blessing and sprinkling with holy water. On Sundays outside Lent and Advent, we then sing the Gloria, an ancient hymn of praise. This is followed by the Collect, or Opening Prayer, in which we pray to God the Father and are called to focus on the special character of the celebration. We affirm this prayer by acclaiming, "Amen".

These introductory rites are important because they focus us on our communal prayer in Christ and prepare us for listening to God's word. Be there early. Be ready to join your Christian family in prayer!