

WHY DO WHAT WE DO AT MASS???

INTRODUCTORY RITES

Introduction

Each Sunday, we make an effort to head to Church. We are coming out of a world of busyness and concerns – children, parents, extended family, friends, jobs, school, retirement, security, violence, traffic, and even a lack of sleep to name some real issues touching real lives. Given these things, it is not always easy to take the time and be prepared to celebrate the Eucharist.

There are a number of things that the Catholic Community of Pleasanton does pastorally and ritually to help make the transition – to prepare minds and hearts to listen to the Word of God to be proclaimed in the hearing of those gathered and to enter more deeply and purposefully into the great prayer of thanksgiving we offer in and with Christ to our loving God and Father (GIRM 46).

Pastoral Considerations

To gather for any occasion is about preparations, introductions, and beginnings. There are two pastoral considerations worth noting as these relate to the Mass in general and the Introductory Rites in particular.

First, creating an environment of welcome is of great importance. We have trained “greeters” who welcome the members of a parish community, newcomers, and visitors. Encounters of welcome occur between members themselves who greet one another in word and gesture. These actions indicate that we gather together as one communitarian body to celebrate Eucharist. To create such an atmosphere should be viewed as a necessary preface to the formal gathering of the mystical Body of Christ in the Introductory Rites. So, arrive a little early and greet the greeter! Say hello to your neighbor. Ask about each other’s day or week ahead.

Second, those gathered need time to reflect upon individual readiness to celebrate the Eucharist (Mass). This can begin at home and continue at St. Augustine or St. Elizabeth Seton as the assembly gathers to prepare to memorialize the great sacrifice made for salvation and offer thanks for this immeasurable gift. Silence is a particular engine to drive preparation. It allows God’s people to pause and resist the pace set by the non-stop sequence of events we calendar day after day. We need to enter into a space that is characterized by “getting lost in the moment” where something of paramount significance happens. There is nothing more significant than Mass.

The Structure of the Introductory Rites

There are four distinct movements in the Introductory Rites (the beginning of Mass) – the entrance, the penitential act, the *Gloria*, and the opening prayer.

During the first movement, the entrance, the assembly gathers in song or paused reflection. This is not “walking music” to get the principal players on stage. The great hymns raised to glorify God should soar to the vaults of heaven. Lip sync is not an option. Sing from your soul. Then, the great signs of faith representing salvation lead us all in procession on the journey to the high altar, to the new and eternal Jerusalem – the processional cross, the Book of the Gospels, some ministers and the priest accompanied by a deacon (when present). The priest and deacon (when present) venerate the altar, which represents

Christ. The gesture is a kiss. Depending upon the solemnity celebrated, by day or season, the priest may incense the altar and cross.

After greeting the altar, the priest stands at his chair and together with all who have gathered makes the Sign of the Cross. He then greets the people with one of the three options offered in the New Roman Missal, e.g. "Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ." Following the priest's greeting, the people reply, "And with your spirit" which acknowledges the presence and grace of Jesus the Christ in the spirit and soul of the priest who presides over the assembly. This dialogue between priest and people is not a mere outward sign of a communal gathering, but this exchange fosters communion in Christ between priest and people. (*The reply of the people is the literal translation of the Latin text and has been used by almost all other language translations, other than English, since the reforms of the liturgy during the 1960's at the Second Vatican Council.*)

In the second movement, the priest invites those assembled to take part in the penitential act. The act reminds us that we have gathered as a sinful people before a merciful God. The act is a glorious statement of the redemption we strive to live. There are three penitential options: the Confiteor or general confession of sin, a dialogue format spoken between priest and people, or three invocations or tropes. In this case, the tropes are chanted or spoken by the priest, deacon or other minister. In each case the Kyrie or "Lord have mercy" is intoned and repeated by the assembly as an acclamation (GIRM 51, 52). The words that acknowledge us as "forgiven" or absolved are given by the priest. It is important to underscore that these words of faith should not be understood as a sacramental or confessional absolution. Instead they are a fitting reminder that we all seek God's mercy, especially as we celebrate the sacred and central mysteries. Finally, during Easter time and a few occasions when appropriate, the blessing and sprinkling of water may take place as a reminder and memorialization of our Baptism, in which case this water rite replaces the Penitential Act.

In the third movement, the ancient hymn, the *Gloria*, is sung on Sundays, solemnities and feasts, and at special celebrations. It proclaims our praise to God the Father for the gift of the Passover Lamb of God, Jesus the Christ, along with the gift of the Holy Spirit. He frees us and has mercy upon us. During the seasons of penance and anticipation, Advent and Lent, the *Gloria* is not a part of the Introductory Rites (*two exceptions are made during Advent: the Solemnity of the Immaculate Conception and the Feast of Our Lady of Guadalupe*).

In the fourth movement, the opening prayer or "collect" is offered after a brief period of silence. By "collect," the summation of the assembly's intentions, is formed into a petition. The "collect" is the capstone of all that precedes it and the culmination of the Introductory Rites. It is addressed to the Father, through the Christ and in the unity of the Holy Spirit. In response to the petition made by the priest on behalf of the gathered, the assembly makes the prayer their own with a resounding, "Amen."

The Conclusion

The Introductory Rites are words and actions of transition. The rites serve as a bridge so to prepare, begin, and celebrate the great mystery of the Eucharist. The Church must get ready, gather, acknowledge who we are as a gathered people and bring all we have been, are and hope to be into that prayer to introduce us into mass, the great mystery of our faith.

SEE YOU ON THURSDAY NIGHT, 7:30 PM at ST. ELIZABETH SETON CHURCH... More to come!!!