

THE CATHOLIC MASS

INTRODUCTORY RITES

The Introductory Rites begin when the people stand after the bell is rung and finish when they sit down before the Readings. The purpose of these Rites is to ensure that the Faithful establish communion as God's Family and dispose themselves to listen fruitfully to God's Word and celebrate the Eucharist with devotion.

THE OPENING SONG

On Sundays everyone usually sings an Opening Song. It should be such that everyone is able, in some degree, to join in. Its purpose is to open the celebration, foster the unity of those present, introduce their thoughts to the Liturgical Season in hand or Feast being celebrated and accompany the entrance procession, if there is one.

The Opening Hymn or song normally replaces a one-sentence Antiphon to be found in the Missal for the Mass of the Day - so much the better if the choir can sing the Antiphon and repeat it as long as the procession lasts.

THE ENTRY PROCESSION

On Sundays the procession, consisting of (Thurifer), Cross-bearer, Candle-bearers, Readers (one carrying the Book of the Gospels) and Priest moves up the centre aisle of the church and unhurried. The Reader who carries up the Book of the Gospels places it reverently on the centre of the Altar and bows before it. After the Priest venerates the Altar he may incense it before going to the Presidential Chair to begin Mass.

SIGN OF THE CROSS

The Priest makes the sign of the cross while saying or singing the appropriate words after which the people respond by saying or singing 'Amen'. 'Amen' is borrowed from the Hebrew.

THE GREETING

The priest then has a choice of three greetings to use and the response to these is changed in the revised translation. When the Priest says: "The Lord be with you" the congregation responds with "And with your spirit". The words are intended as a prayer as much as a greeting. They are said at five pivotal times during the Mass. Both the greeting and reply are rooted firmly in the Bible. "The Lord be with you" is found in Judges 6:12, Ruth 2:4, Chronicles 15:2, and Luke 1:28. "And with your spirit" is found in 2 Timothy 4:22, Galatians 6:18, Philippians 4:23 and Philemon 25.

OPENING WORDS

After the greeting the Priest may introduce the Mass with a few brief but well-chosen words. This helps to focus people's minds on the theme of the Mass being celebrated.

PENITENTIAL ACT

There are three options for the Penitential Act. They are in the form of three acclamations concluding with 'Lord, have mercy, Christ, have mercy, Lord, have mercy' which everyone repeats after the Priest. Priests have the option of substituting the English words 'Lord, have mercy' with the original Greek texts, 'Kyrie eleison, Christe eleison, Kyrie eleison'. Another popular form of the Penitential Act is the prayer known by its Latin title, 'The Confiteor'. The 'Confiteor' is followed as always by 'Lord, have mercy'. The priest concludes the Penitential Act with an absolution – though it is not to be confused with the one he gives in the Sacrament of Penance.

THE GLORIA

We sing or recite it on all Sundays of the year except during Advent or Lent. It is also said or sung on other Feast days. Everyone may sing or recite the Gloria together or, if sung, the people may alternate with the Choir or the Choir may sing it alone. It may be intoned by the Priest, Cantor or Choir. The text of the Gloria (5th century) should not be altered from that which is in the Missal whether sung or said.

THE COLLECT (Opening Prayer)

The 'Collect' completes the introductory Rites. It may be sung or said. After the priest says, 'Let us pray', all observe a brief silence so that they may be conscious of the fact that they are in God's presence and call their own petitions to mind. The Collect expresses the character of the celebration and prepares the congregation to listen to God's Word.

THE LITURGY OF THE WORD

INTRODUCTION

In the Readings, God speaks to His people with great love, opening up to them the mystery of redemption and salvation, and nourishing their spirit. Christ is Present in His Word when it is proclaimed at Mass. By their silent listening and pondering, by their singing and acclamations, the people make God's Word their own and affirm their acceptance of it in the Creed. The Biblical Readings and their accompanying Scripture chants may not be omitted, or replaced by non-biblical texts.

'PAUSE FOR THOUGHT'

After the Reader says: 'The Word of the Lord', there is a short pause before the Psalm is said or sung. There are several

places in the Mass where silent reflection is called for. The Liturgy will be all the poorer if we ignore them.

It may sometimes be helpful for the Readings to be introduced by a brief word from the Celebrant in order to facilitate listening..

THE PSALM

The Psalm is an integral part of the Liturgy of the Word. It is best sung - at least on Sundays. The psalms, which come from the Old Testament, were used by Christ Himself in prayer. Appropriate psalms have been selected to help the Assembly to meditate on, and respond to the Word of God in the First Reading.

The standard procedure is that the Cantor sings the prescribed Psalm from the Lectern (Ambo) and the whole Assembly comes in on the sung response.

THE GOSPEL ACCLAMATION

This Gospel acclamation is sung while the Book of the Gospels is being carried to the Lectern (Ambo) accompanied by lighted torches and incense. This Acclamation Chant is sung by everyone present. The verse may be sung by the Cantor or Choir or even recited by the congregation. It's like a fanfare introducing the gospel of the Lord Jesus. The gospel is the high-point of the Liturgy of the Word.

THE GOSPEL

This is the high point of the Liturgy of the Word. It is reserved for the Deacon or Priest. While bowing before the altar the Priest says a quiet prayer before he proceeds to read the Gospel. To highlight its importance, the Book of the Gospels may be incensed before the Reading. After the Gospel, as he kisses the book, the Priest says quietly the following words: "Through the words of the gospel may our sins be wiped away". To highlight its importance the Servers may stand with lighted torches at each side of the Lectern (Ambo) while the Gospel is proclaimed.

THE HOMILY (sermon)

The Homily is an integral part of the Sacred Liturgy. It helps the assembly to understand the Word of God, assimilate it and apply it to their lives. On Sundays or holydays the homily may not be omitted without a serious reason. It is reserved to the Priest or Deacon and is not to be given by a lay person. It's most appropriate that a period of silence follows the Homily, so that the people may take the Word of God to heart. The Homily may be given either from the Lectern or from the Priest's Chair.

The Word of God first enters into my (mind) through my ears – 'faith comes through hearing' (Rom10:17.) It then must be allowed to 'drop from my head into my heart so that I make it my own and understand its implications and finally it reaches my hands so that I put it into practice in my daily life, remembering St James's words 'faith without good works is dead'. Remember the three H's - hearing, heart and hands.

THE PROFESSION OF FAITH (CREED)

The purpose of the Nicene Creed (formulated in the fifth century at the Council of Nicea) is that the whole Assembly may respond to the Word of God taken from the Readings and subsequently explained in the Homily. On more solemn occasions it can be sung but it is normally said.. A profound bow is made by all at the phrase 'by the power of the Holy Spirit...and was made man'. At masses on Christmas Day and the Feast of the Annunciation all kneel at these words.

THE BIDDING PRAYERS

Having being nourished by the Word, the Faithful prays the 'bidding prayers' for the needs of the entire Church, for civil authorities, for those weighed down by various needs, for the local community and for the salvation of all.

LITURGY OF THE EUCHARIST

PREPARATION OF THE GIFTS

At this point in the Mass the gifts of bread and wine are brought to the altar by members of the congregation and presented to the Priest. The collection and sometimes donations for the poor may also be part of the 'offertory' but not token items which will be retrieved after Mass.

The purpose of any chant at this point in the Mass, is to

accompany the taking of the collection, the procession and Presentation of the gifts of bread, water and wine.

The prayers accompanying the placing of the gifts on the Altar are based upon Jewish table-prayers.

*'Blessed are you Lord God of all creation
for through your goodness we have received The Bread we
offer You. Fruit of the earth and work of human hands
It will become for us the Bread of Life'*

These words express praise to God for the gift of creation and for human involvement in the making of bread and wine. Since wheat needs to be ground and grapes crushed before the bread and wine are made, the element of sacrifice is implied. The Mass is the Sacrifice of Christ and in union with Him, through the ministry of the Priest, we offer our lives to the Father.

As the Priest washes his hands he says quietly 'Wash me, O Lord, from my iniquity and cleanse me from my sin'. The Priest then invites the congregation to pray. In the revised text it runs:

*'Pray brethren (brothers and sisters) that my sacrifice and
yours may be acceptable to God the Almighty Father.'*

The Presentation of the Gifts concludes with a Prayer over the Offerings.

THE EUCHARISTIC PRAYER

This Prayer is the centre and summit of the entire celebration of Mass. It is proclaimed by the Priest in the name of Christ and on behalf of the entire assembly which professes its faith and gives its assent through dialogue and acclamations culminating in the Great Amen. The Eucharistic Prayer is said by the Priest alone and all the people should listen to it attentively with reverence and silence. The chief elements making up this Prayer are as follows:

THANKSGIVING: This is especially brought out in the Preface. The Priest, in the name of the people glorifies God the Father and gives thanks for the whole work of Creation or for some special aspect of it that corresponds to the Feast day or Liturgical Season in hand.

ACCLAMATION (*Holy Holy*): Uniting their voices with the Heavenly Hosts of Angels in a universal outburst of praise, the Priest and congregation sing the 'Sanctus' or 'Holy, Holy', the first line of which is based on a passage from the Book of Isaiah (6:3).. 'Hosts' in the Latin translation is 'Sabaoth'. Actually it is a Hebrew word fused with the Latin. It refers to God's command over the armies of Angels. It proclaims the power of God who has all the forces of Heaven and Earth under his control.

'Blessed is He who comes in the name of the Lord' is a direct quote from Psalm 118:26. The 'Holy Holy' is a musical priority and, if possible, should always be sung. The words of the text should correspond with those in the Roman Missal and not be altered.

'EPICLEISIS': (meaning 'invocation upon') By stretching his hands, palms down, over the offerings the Priest in the name of the Church implores the Holy Spirit to come down on the Bread and Wine so they become Christ's Body and Blood at the consecration. This change is referred to as 'Transubstantiation'

INSTITUTION NARRATIVE AND CONSECRATION:

In words and actions the Sacrifice which Christ instituted at the Last Supper is celebrated. Under the appearance of Bread and Wine He offered His Body and Blood for us on the Cross, gave them to the Apostles to eat and drink and commanded that they carry on this mystery in His memory. Memorial, in the scriptures is not merely recording a past event but in a certain sense making it present again sacramentally. At Mass Christ does not suffer or die again. Rather he represents, prolongs, and renews His great moment of sacrifice down through the centuries - it's like Calvary being suspended in time for the benefit of men and women of every generation until He returns in Glory.

After the Consecration there is as usual the 'Proclamation of Faith'. It should always be sung.

'ANAMNESIS': (memory). Fulfilling the command of Christ given to the Apostles at the Last Supper and passed on to us, the Church treasures the memory of the saving work of Christ in His Passion, Death and Resurrection.

OFFERING: The Church here and now assembled offers Christ, the Victim to the Father in the Holy Spirit. The Faithful also offer themselves so as to be drawn into ever more

perfect union, through Christ, with God the Father and with each other so that God may be all in all.

INTERCESSIONS: The Eucharist is a celebration of the whole church in Heaven, on Earth and in Purgatory, so the offering is made for all its members both Living and Dead.

THE FINAL DOXOLOGY: Just like the Eucharistic Prayer opens with a dialogue so also it closes with one. The praise of God is expressed in the Doxology which is sung by the priest, then affirmed and concluded by the people's sung response in the Great Amen. Since it consists of only two syllables it may be best to repeat it a number of times when sung.

THE COMMUNION RITE

THE LORD'S PRAYER

Because of its themes of Daily Bread and mutual forgiveness the Lord's Prayer is the most appropriate preparation for Holy Communion "so that what is holy may be given to those who are holy". The Communion Rite begins with the Lord's Prayer and continues through the prayer after Communion.

THE SIGN OF PEACE

After the Lord's Prayer the Priest prays for peace and unity in the Church. In this prayer pronouns referring to the Church are feminine. This recalls the Church's image as the Bride of Christ. The Sign of Peace is optional but it is normally

exchanged. It should only be given to those nearest to you and in a sober manner.

THE FRACTION

The priest breaks the large host to signify that we are part of one body (1Cor:10:17) because we all receive from the 'one loaf'. One of the early names for the entire Mass was 'the breaking of bread'.

The Priest puts a small piece of the Bread into the chalice to signify the unity of Christ's Body and Blood in the work of salvation.

(The Body and Blood of Christ should only be received by Catholics who are properly disposed. On-going repentance should be a common feature in the lives of Christians. Holy Communion will be more fruitfully received by those who are no strangers to private confession, before which they should make a thorough examination of conscience. We all need to be on our guard against the deadly effects of routine. It was only after the Prodigal Son turned away from his sinful way of life and was reconciled with his Father that a family feast (communion) was in order, but not before. According to Church teaching there are some states of life which deter one from receiving the Holy Sacrament. Non-Catholics are not allowed to receive Holy Communion at the catholic Mass.)

WORDS OF WISDOM FROM ST PADRE PIO: *"My dear daughter, I think that the holy Eucharist is a great means through which to aspire to perfection. But we must receive it with the desire and intention of removing from the heart all*

that is displeasing to him with whom we wish to dwell". (Letter to Maria Gargani 1917) Saint Pio of Pietrelcina)

HOLY COMMUNION

An appropriate hymn, sung by the people whilst coming up to receive Holy Communion is the norm. After the distribution of Holy Communion, however, a period of silence is called for. (Pope Benedict observed quite an extended period of silence after Holy Communion during His Mass at Westminster Cathedral in 2010). What also goes down very well is an uplifting meditative piece sung by the Choir alone when everyone is settled.

THE CONCLUDING RITE

If the priest is using a solemn blessing he will first say: 'Please bow your heads for the blessing'. The people's answer to each of the blessings is the Hebrew word 'Amen'.

The recessional hymn is optional and may be replaced by organ music. The Mass ends when the priest says: "The Mass is ended, go in peace".