

# INTRODUCTORY RITES

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## **Introduction**

Each Sunday, Churches are entered in Oakland and Byron, Hayward and Concord, Fremont and Martinez, Pleasanton and Richmond, and in cities and towns throughout the Diocese. Families are coming out of a world of busyness and concerns – children, parents, extended family, friends, jobs, retirement, security, violence, traffic, and even a lack of sleep to name some of the real issues touching real lives. Given these things, it is not easy to take leave and be prepared to celebrate the Eucharist.

There are a number of things that the Church 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. Many parishes 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 and others cultivate and point toward the communitarian nature of the celebration of 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.

Second, those gathered need time to reflect upon individual readiness to celebrate the Eucharistic sacrifice. This can begin at home and continue in the Church building 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 leave the pace set by the non-stop sequence of events we calendar and enter into a space that is characterized by indeterminate time 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 entrance, the penitential act, the *Gloria*, and the opening prayer.

During the first movement, the entrance, the priest enters with a deacon (when present) and other ministers to reverence the altar as the primary and central symbol at the celebration of the Eucharist. After all have bowed to the altar or have genuflected (if the tabernacle is situated in the sanctuary [GIRM 274]), 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 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. 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, 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 of absolution are given by the priest and though they should not be understood as a sacramental or confessional absolution, 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 other times a year, the blessing and sprinkling of water may take place as a reminder of our Baptism, in which case this ritual 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 values informal and formal ritual gathering to prepare minds and hearts for an encounter with the living Jesus Christ.