

The Introductory Rites of the Mass
03/12/17

As I mentioned last week, I am doing a 5-part series on the Mass. In the bulletin last week, I said we need to come to Mass with humble and forgiving hearts. Then, in my homily, I spoke about the clothes I wear and the colors and what they mean. Today I'll be speaking about the beginning of the Mass itself, what is referred to as the Introductory Rites.

In Fr. Philip's book, as a part of his section on the Introductory Rites, he says we need to have a welcoming heart and uses a citation from Hebrews to support his idea: "Do not neglect hospitality, for through it some have unknowingly entertained angels." Heb. 13:2. In order to properly enter into the spirit of the Mass, we should feel like we have been welcomed and we, in turn, should welcome those we encounter. If we are shunned at the door or in the pew, that attitude will most likely rub off on us. So as a part of our weekly routine, let's do our best to greet each other as the brothers and sisters in Christ we are. Now on to the Mass.

At St. Pat's, we usually begin each Mass with what we call the cantor announcements. These include where the readings of the day can be found, as well as where the sung Mass parts are located in the hymnal. We pray for those who are in need of our prayers and those names written in our book of intentions and we pray for those who have recently died. Then the procession begins.

So, when does Mass actually begin? At St. Pat's, it begins with the announcements. At minimum, Mass starts with the opening procession. This usually includes a hymn or song, during which the ministers enter via the center aisle. In the bulletin, I mention how the procession varies here at St. Pat's, depending on the season and whether there will be a baptism at Mass. But for sure Mass starts with the procession. Allow me to digress.

I realize there will be days when arriving at Mass on time is difficult if not impossible: kids are not cooperating, unexpected accidents happen at the house, maybe a train causes a delay. However,

there are some who arrive late or nearly late every weekend and that's not respectful to the rest who are already in church. If your children or grandchildren were in a sporting event or play or dance competition, would you arrive even one minute tardy? I seriously doubt it. Back to the Mass.

The Mass continues with the Sign of the Cross, greeting and Penitential Rite, Gloria and Opening Prayer. As noted in Mike Aquilina's little book, *Understanding the Mass*, the Penitential Rite is a public confession of our sins. It's important to approach the Mass with a pure heart, so a few moments of silence give us a chance to think about what sins are weighing on us. In the Confiteor, which we use here during Lent, we confess our sorrow for these sins. Dramatic gestures (striking our breasts) and repetition remind us of how serious our sins are and how desperately we want to be rid of them. We ask our brothers and sisters and the saints in heaven to pray for us.

Another form of the Penitential Rite is the Greek Kyrie, in which we ask God to have mercy on us. We use the ancient Greek during Lent, a holdover from the ancient rituals, even after the Mass was translated into Latin. It is important to remember that the sins forgiven during this part of the Mass are only the lesser sins, often referred to as venial. The graver or mortal sins must be brought to the Sacrament of Reconciliation.

Following the Penitential Rite, we sing the Gloria, unless we are in the seasons of Advent or Lent, when that great hymn is omitted. Then we hear the Opening Prayer and all are seated as the next part of the Mass, the Liturgy of the Word, is about to begin.

In today's Gospel, we hear of Jesus' Transfiguration. For those who have trouble arriving at Mass on time, perhaps this season of Lent might be a good time to transfigure your minds and hearts to a new attitude of timeliness.