

## THE BEAUTY OF THE MASS—14

I would like to continue the explanation of the Mass by explaining the Entrance Rite.

The celebration of the Mass begins with the entrance procession of the priest and ministers. The entrance procession reminds us of the journey of the pilgrim Church toward heaven. An entrance hymn usually accompanies the procession to announce that Christ is with us, and we are ready to unite ourselves to Him. If a hymn is not sung, an antiphon prayer is said or sung.

We gather together by singing our opening hymn. It is important that everyone join together in singing the hymns at Mass. Remember what St Augustine said, “*He who sings well, prays twice.*”

As the entrance procession begins, the congregation should stand and turn toward the center aisle until the procession has passed. We turn to welcome Christ who is present in the person of the priest, who is present in the words of the Book of the Gospels, and who is present in all our brothers and sisters whom we are facing.

The entrance procession is usually led by the Processional Cross of the crucified Lord, a symbol of the focus of our faith, carried between two candles. On solemn feasts, the entrance procession is led by the thurifer—the minister carrying the thurible with burning incense.

Sometimes, other ministers also carry banners to mark the beauty and importance of the celebration.

The lector or deacon carries in the Book of the Gospels, held high to show its prominence in our lives and to remember that we always stand obediently under God's word.

Finally, the priest celebrant enters. He is a representative of Christ, and the prayer leader of the assembly.

Our Entrance Rite continues with the celebrant proceeding to his chair and leading the congregation with the **Sign of the Cross**. Since we were born again through baptism to the life of grace under the sign of the cross and in the name of the Trinity, and since we were strengthened in that life through the Sacrament of Confirmation and under the name of the Triune God, it is most appropriate that we now approach the very source of our spiritual life in the name of the most Blessed Trinity. This sign identifies who we are...Christians and adopted children of God.

Then the priest greets the people with the words, "***The Lord be with you.***" With this greeting, the celebrant declares to us that the Lord is truly present. The priest accompanies these words, or others like them, with a gesture of his arms extended to signify Christ embracing His people. The congregation responds, "***And with your spirit.***"

The Entrance Rite continues with the **Penitential Rite**. Here we acknowledge that we are finite creatures and sinners who are in need of God's help. We ask God for His mercy and forgiveness by praying the ***Confiteor*** or "***I confess...***" or one of the other Penitential formulae. At the end, the celebrant prays, "***May Almighty God have mercy on us, forgive us our sins, and bring us to everlasting life.***"

After expressing our sorrow for sin, we sing the *Kyrie Eleison*, a Greek phrase that means, “*Lord, have mercy.*” We join the blind man of Jericho, the Canaanite woman and the lepers in the Gospels who cried out, “*Lord, have mercy.*” Like them, we know we have nothing, but we hope to receive everything from God, especially His mercy, which is indispensable for our salvation. If the Kyrie is not sung, it is to be recited either in English or in the original Greek.

The Penitential Rite of the Mass is not a Sacramental confession. Therefore, it does not bring immediate remission of mortal sins. Forgiveness of mortal sins has to be obtained in the Sacrament of Penance or Confession. It is also important to remember that a person who has committed a mortal sin cannot go to Communion unless he or she goes to confession beforehand. But the Penitential Rite, if it said with true contrition, helps to obtain pardon for venial sins, as well as to stir up sorrow for past sins that have already been forgiven. In this way, it helps to purify us so that we can participate more fully in the Holy Mass.

Sometimes, especially during the Easter Season, the Rite of Blessing and Sprinkling of Holy Water is used. When this form is used, it takes the place of the Penitential Rite and the *Kyrie* is omitted. Again, the blessing and sprinkling of holy water remind the congregation of their Baptism and the forgiveness of sins we received through Baptism.