

## Understanding the Mass – the Procession, Greeting and Penitential Rite

The procession at the beginning of the Mass is really the culmination of the procession that began at the creation of the world in the Father's desire to draw all creation to Himself through Christ. He now gathers us together from all our various backgrounds and circumstances to form us into the Body of Christ. Each of us is here because we received the faith from someone else. This faith was first proclaimed by the apostles who received it from our Lord Himself. It has passed from one generation to the next down to us; a living faith that we are now privileged to share. The procession acts out and actually causes to happen what it signifies. Jesus Christ is coming and standing in the midst of His people, represented by the Celebrant who processes to the altar. We stand and sing. Standing is a posture of hope and Song is a mystery that puts into words and melody the joy that is in our hearts and echoes the hymn sung eternally in heaven.

This is an opportunity to consider our attire for Mass. We do not dress up for ourselves but to honor the one whose presence we are entering. Just as one would not consider going to dinner with a Head of State dressed in shabby clothes, so should we wear attire appropriate to honor the God who has invited us into His presence and of our King and Lord, Jesus Christ, who leads our assembly.

When all are in their place, we begin with the Sign of the Cross, reaffirming our belief in the Trinity and the faith we entered into at our baptism. It is a sign of victory over sin and death, a sign of hope in our own resurrection. It is a gesture that protects us from evil and focuses us on Jesus Christ. The Sign of the Cross also summarizes all that is about to happen as we join with Christ in His sacrifice on the Cross made present on the altar.

This is followed by the Apostolic greeting which comes from the words of St. Paul in the Epistles. It is meant to be much more than our standard greeting of *Good morning/Good evening*. Instead, it is a uniquely Christian greeting that has been passed down from the beginning of the Church. In it the priest greets the people in his sacramental role of representing Christ at the head of his Body and who will lead us in prayer.

It is in this greeting and our response that we will encounter the first changes in the new translation of the Missal. Note that there will not be any changes in the form of the Mass but only in some of the words that we use. The reason for this, once again, is to use the words that more closely reflect the biblical language and articulate more clearly the faith we profess.

We often begin with: "*The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all*". The last part will now change to "*the communion of the Holy Spirit*" which suggests more of the Spirit's dynamic action of sharing the love of God with us and a deeper sharing in the life of the Trinity.

Our response, translated literally from Latin will be "*And with your spirit*". This response recognizes the Sacrament of Ordination conferred on the priest for his role in leading us in worship and on the deacon who proclaims the Gospel. It means much more than "and with you" by addressing the very spirit of the priest and deacon who have been ordained to lead these sacred actions and expresses the desire that the Lord be more powerfully present in them.

After the apostolic greeting and response we follow with the Penitential Rite. In the Mass we have come into God's presence and we recognize our unworthiness to stand before the all-holy God. We realize that we are sinners and that our only hope is God's mercy so we pause for a moment of silence and then ask for the Lord's forgiveness and mercy so that, as the prayer says: "*we may find ourselves worthy to celebrate these sacred mysteries*".

Here again we encounter new words from the translation of the Missal. There are various forms of the Penitential Rite that we can use. The form we generally use on Sundays will now sound a bit different as the words have been changed to more closely correspond with scriptures:

We now say "*You were sent to heal the contrite*" will become "*You were sent to heal the contrite **of heart.***" (we are sorry for our sins – deep down to the very core – our heart). Adding the word "heart" makes this petition echo the prayers of the psalmist and the scripture "You shall love the Lord your God with your whole heart.

We now say "*You plead for us ... Father.*" This will become "*You are **seated** at the right hand of the Father to intercede for us.*" This new language acknowledges more fully that Jesus is not only our High Priest who prays for us but He is God Himself who approaches the Father on our behalf and will always save us.

You will also notice on the Pew Card – Form A of the Penitential Rite. Form A is known as the *Confiteor* which is used on occasion. It better reflects the Latin text of the Mass and helps cultivate a more humble, sorrowful attitude toward God as we confess our sins. In it we will strike our breast three times in a sign of repentance while saying "*Through my fault, through my fault, through my most grievous fault.*"

In this world that takes sin so lightly and dismisses it so easily, to pray this way may seem extreme. But in the Mass we want to not only apologize to God for having offended Him but try to cultivate a heartfelt contrition and humbly admit that we have sinned.

Our hope is that with a deeper understanding of these parts of the Mass we will be better prepared to truly "approach the sacred mysteries of the Mass" with greater love and devotion.