



THE MYSTERY OF FAITH

A STUDY IN THE STRUCTURAL ELEMENTS
OF THE ORDER OF THE MASS

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1 GENERAL OVERVIEW

HISTORICAL SURVEY

As early as the mid-second century the celebration of the Eucharist, already separated from its setting within a regular meal, was usually preceded by a Scripture service. The people gathered in silence and, when all had arrived, a lector began to proclaim the word. This ancient practice of beginning immediately with the readings was preserved in the Roman Liturgy of Good Friday till 1956.

But the psychological desire to give a definitive starting point to the celebration and to provide an initial experience of prayer resulted in the gradual development of various introductory rites and formulas. In fifth-century Africa St. Augustine greeted the people before the Scriptures were proclaimed. In late seventh-century Rome the Pope with his ministers passed through the assembly in procession and then began with an initial prayer. During centuries to come other elements, often of a private nature and reflecting the piety of generations and cultures, were added before the Scripture proclamations.

Although not greatly reducing the number of introductory rites, the Order of Mass has at least given them a public character; it has also attempted to arrange them in a structure that is more logical and adaptable.

DOCUMENTATION

General Instruction of the Roman Missal, Third Edition

46. The rites that precede the Liturgy of the Word, namely the Entrance, the Greeting, the Penitential Act, the *Kyrie*, the *Gloria in excelsis* (Glory to God in the highest) and Collect, have the character of a beginning, an introduction, and a preparation.
Their purpose is to ensure that the faithful, who come together as one, establish communion and dispose themselves properly to listen to the Word of God and to celebrate the Eucharist worthily. In certain celebrations that are combined with Mass according to the norms of the liturgical books, the Introductory Rites are omitted or take place in a particular way.
42. ... A common bodily posture, to be observed by all those taking part, is a sign of the unity of the members of the Christian community gathered together for the Sacred Liturgy, for it expresses the intentions and spiritual attitude of the participants and also fosters them.
43. The faithful should stand from the beginning of the Entrance Chant, or while the Priest approaches the altar, until the end of the Collect ...
For the sake of uniformity in gestures and postures during one and the same celebration, the faithful should follow the directions which the Deacon, a lay minister, or the Priest gives, according to what is laid down in the Missal.

Sing to the Lord: Music in Divine Worship

139. The first part of the Mass consists of rites that “have the character of a beginning, introduction, and preparation.” [GIRM, no. 46] They include an Entrance chant or song, the reverencing of the altar, a greeting of the people, an Act of Penitence and the *Kyrie* (or the Sprinkling Rite), *Gloria*, and Collect.
140. These rites are designed “to ensure that the faithful who come together as one establish communion and dispose themselves to listen properly to God’s word and to celebrate the Eucharist worthily.” [GIRM, no. 46] So that the people might come together as one, it is

appropriate that they always sing at least one piece as a congregation in the introductory rites—Entrance song or chant, *Kyrie*, or *Gloria*—apart from the sung dialogues of the Liturgy.

141. On certain occasions, such as Palm Sunday, or when the other sacraments or rites are celebrated at Mass, some of these rites are omitted or celebrated in a particular manner that requires variations in the choice of music. Those responsible for the musical preparation of the Liturgy must be aware of these variations in practice.

REFLECTION

These rites, serving to introduce and prepare for the Liturgy of the Word and the Liturgy of the Eucharist, are to help the people become a community at worship, an assembly convoked by God. The people, gathering in response to God's call, come together in a spirit of friendliness and hospitality. By celebrating these rites they deepen their unity as a people among whom the Lord is present.

Structurally, these rites are of secondary importance and are celebrated as such. Their major elements are the celebrant's greeting and the people's response (or perhaps the entrance song) and the Opening Prayer or Collect.

SUGGESTED QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

1. How are the people greeted as they gather? By whom are they greeted?
2. How are the people prepared and encouraged to celebrate the liturgy?
3. What is the purpose of the Introductory Rites?
4. What are their major elements?
5. At what times during the introductory rites does the celebrant need the Missal?

2 ENTRANCE PROCESSION

HISTORICAL SURVEY

Once the Church began to celebrate the Eucharist within large buildings, it was natural to utilize the space these structures provided. Most probably some type of formal entrance into the basilica already existed by the fourth century. An expansion of this action eventually occurred. Since the sacristy was located close to the entrance of the major churches at Rome, the Pope accompanied by a large retinue of ministers entered the church from the sacristy and solemnly processed from the church's door to the altar. The precise period when this solemn entrance developed is not known; it is attested for the papal Mass shortly after 701 A.D. Just before the various ministers entered the church, an acolyte solemnly carried in the book containing the gospel passages. Outside Rome, where there were fewer ministers, the procession was more modest. But as the Mass was gradually linked to the Liturgy of the Hours for which the clergy were already assembled, sacristies came to be located in proximity to the sanctuary. Consequently, the procession was generally abbreviated or fell into complete disuse. Today it has been restored, usually with the priest and ministers processing from the rear of the church.

DOCUMENTATION

General Instruction of the Roman Missal, Third Edition

120. When the people are gathered, the Priest and ministers, wearing the sacred vestments, go in procession to the altar in this order:
- a) the thurifer carrying a smoking thurible, if incense is being used;
 - b) ministers who carry lighted candles, and between them an acolyte or other minister with the cross;
 - c) the acolytes and the other ministers;
 - d) A reader, who may carry a Book of the Gospels (though not the Lectionary), slightly elevated;
 - e) the Priest who is to celebrate the Mass.
- If incense is being used, before the procession begins, the Priest puts some into the thurible and blesses it with the Sign of the Cross without saying anything.

REFLECTION

The entrance procession is not just a functional action of solemnly introducing the Priest and other ministers to the sanctuary; it is also a visual expression of the people becoming a liturgical community, of being together as a people, a people who have gathered in response to God's invitation. This liturgical assembly visibly manifests at a determined time and in a specified place the presence of Christ and the very nature of the Church whose members possess distinct offices and ministries.

Thus the procession, together with its accompanying song, is a sign of the self-identity of both ministers and people.

SUGGESTED QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

1. What is the purpose of the Entrance procession?
2. Is it always desirable to have an Entrance procession?
3. Are there particular seasons or occasions when a more solemn procession is appropriate?
4. Does the procession always have to include all the ministers of the celebration?
5. Should those who are not ministers ever be included in the procession?
6. Is there ever a danger of symbolically overloading the procession?

7. What is the route of the procession? How long does it take? What is its pace?
8. What attention is given to the position and spacing of the procession's participants?
9. In what manner is the Book of the Gospels carried?
10. Is the Book of the Gospels to be used only at Sunday celebrations?
11. How is the assembly notified as to when to stand?
12. On what occasions would incense be appropriately used during the celebration?
13. May the procession ever be omitted?

3 ENTRANCE SONG

HISTORICAL SURVEY

The majority of the western rites have traditionally accompanied the entrance procession with song. At Rome the members of the *schola cantorum* (a trained body of singers) arranged themselves in two double rows at the entrance to the sanctuary. In antiphonal fashion these two choruses sang the Entrance song or Introit, i.e., a psalm which began and concluded with a short antiphon whose text was taken from the psalm itself, the epistle of the day, or even from a non biblical source. During Carolingian times (eighth and ninth centuries) an attempt was made to have the whole assembly sing the concluding “Glory be to the Father.” Eventually two major factors contributed to a curtailment of the number of verses sung: the rapid elaboration of melody and the abbreviation of the procession itself. As a result, the singing was reduced to the antiphon, one psalm verse, the doxology, and the repetition of the antiphon. The Introit became an independent chant frequently begun when the priest reached the altar. If not sung, it was recited by the priest after the prayers at the foot of the altar. The Entrance song, in which the whole assembly normally participates, once again accompanies the procession of the priest and other ministers. Great freedom is allowed in regard to the choice of its text.

DOCUMENTATION

General Instruction of the Roman Missal, Third Edition

47. When the people are gathered, and as the Priest enters with the Deacon and ministers, the Entrance Chant begins. Its purpose is to open the celebration, foster the unity of those who have been gathered, introduce their thoughts to the mystery of the liturgical time or festivity, and accompany the procession of the Priest and ministers.
48. The chant is sung alternately by the choir and entirely by the people or in a similar way by the cantor and the people, or entirely by the people, or by the choir alone. In the dioceses of the United States of America there are four options for the Entrance Chant: (1) the antiphon from the Missal or the antiphon with its Psalm from the *Graduale Romanum* as set to music there or in another setting; (2) the antiphon and Psalm of the *Graduale Simplex* for the liturgical time; (3) a chant from another collection of Psalms and antiphons, approved by the Conference of Bishops or the Diocesan Bishop, including Psalms arranged in responsorial or metrical forms; (4) another liturgical chant that is suited to the liturgical action, the day, or the time of year, similarly approved by the Conference of Bishops or the Diocesan Bishop.
If there is no singing at the Entrance, the antiphon given in the Missal is recited either by the faithful, or by some of them, or by a reader; otherwise, it is recited by the Priest himself, who may even adapt it as an introductory explanation (cf. no. 31).
121. During the procession to the altar, the Entrance Chant takes place (cf. nos. 47-48).

Sing to the Lord: Music in Divine Worship

142. After the entire liturgical assembly has been gathered, an Entrance chant or song is sung as the procession with the priest, deacon, and ministers enters the church. “The purpose of this chant is to open the celebration, foster the unity of those who have been gathered, introduce their thoughts to the mystery of the liturgical season or festivity, and accompany the procession of the priest and ministers.” [GIRM, no. 47]
143. Care must be taken in the treatment of the texts of psalms, hymns, and songs in the Liturgy. Verses and stanzas should not be omitted arbitrarily in ways that risk distorting their content. While not all musical

pieces require that all verses or stanzas be sung, verses should be omitted only if the text to be sung forms a coherent whole.

144. The text and music for the Entrance song may be drawn from a number of sources.
- a) The singing of an antiphon and psalm during the entrance procession has been a long-standing tradition in the Roman Liturgy. Antiphons and psalms may be drawn from the official liturgical books—the *Graduale Romanum*, or the *Graduale Simplex*—or from other collections of antiphons and psalms.
 - b) Other hymns and songs may also be sung at the Entrance, providing that they are in keeping with the purpose of the Entrance chant or song. The texts of antiphons, psalms, hymns, and songs for the Liturgy must have been approved either by the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops or by the local diocesan bishop. [GIRM, no. 48]

REFLECTION

The purpose of the Entrance song is “to open the celebration, foster the unity of those who have been gathered, introduce their thoughts to the mystery of the liturgical season or festivity, and accompany the procession of the Priest and ministers.” (GIRM, no. 47). This song, designed to accompany a procession, is the first strictly liturgical action of a people among whom Christ is active and present. Uniting the members of the community, the song may assume the form of Psalmody, which is traditional in the Roman Mass, or of hymnody.

SUGGESTED QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

1. In what way can this piece of music be called an “Entrance” song?
2. What is the purpose of the Entrance song?
3. Does it serve as a “greeting” of the presiding minister?
4. Is it more to accompany the procession or to serve as an opening for the celebration?
5. What are the principles governing the choice of its text and music?
6. What style of music reflects the character of an accompaniment to a procession? Of a gathering song?
7. Is psalmody appropriate? Is it ever used?
8. What about a litany?
9. Would it ever be desirable not to have an Entrance song?
10. May instrumental music or silence ever substitute for the Entrance song?
11. When there is no Entrance song, why is the antiphon given in the Missal to be recited?
12. How important is it that the presiding celebrant and other ministers join in the singing?

4 VENERATION OF THE ALTAR

HISTORICAL SURVEY

In ancient times the kiss as a sign of greeting was used to show reverence for temples and images of the gods. It seems that the table was likewise honored before the family meal in places where every meal was considered sacred, where the participants in the meal were seen as either hosts or guests of the household gods. By the fourth century Christian worship appropriated this sign of honor since the altar was the “table of the Lord.” As the altar came to be constructed of stone, it was looked upon as the symbol of Christ, the cornerstone and spiritual rock of the Church. With the growth of the cult of the martyrs, relics were placed beneath the altar, and the kiss was seen as greeting the saints and through them the whole Church triumphant. Until the thirteenth century the altar was kissed only three times during Mass: at the beginning, during the Eucharistic Prayer, and before the dismissal. A century later this sign so multiplied that the importance of the original kiss at the beginning and end of the celebration was perhaps obscured. Today the altar is venerated with a kiss only at the beginning and end of Mass.

The use of incense at worship is of great antiquity. In pre-Christian times it had numerous meanings: a symbol of sacrifice, a festive accompaniment for processions, a sign of honor, a means of purification and of expelling evil spirits. Christians first rejected the use of incense since it was closely associated with pagan cult. But after the time of Constantine (280–337) various dignities accorded to major Roman officials were transferred to the Bishop of Rome and the other Bishops. Thus it became customary to bear incense before them as they entered the church in procession—a vestige of the Roman-Byzantine ceremonial of carrying incense before the Emperor. A formal incensation of the altar in the Roman Mass, however, is only attested in the eleventh century. Scholars suggest that the original meaning of the practice was purification and protection. Furthermore, there was also the Old Testament injunction that the service of the High Priest was to begin with incense (see Leviticus 16:12). At any rate, this incensation was generally interpreted as a sign of the altar’s being encircled by an atmosphere of prayer and sacrifice ascending to God.

DOCUMENTATION

General Instruction of the Roman Missal, Third Edition

49. When they have arrived at the sanctuary, the Priest, the Deacon, and the ministers reverence the altar with a profound bow.
Moreover, as an expression of veneration, the Priest and Deacon then kiss the altar itself; the Priest, if appropriate, also incenses the cross and the altar.
122. When they reach the altar, the Priest and ministers make a profound bow.
The cross adorned with a figure of Christ crucified, and carried in procession, may be placed next to the altar to serve as the altar cross, in which case it must be the only cross used; otherwise it is put away in a dignified place. As for the candlesticks, these are placed on the altar or near it. It is a praiseworthy practice for the Book of the Gospels to be placed on the altar.
123. The Priest goes up to the altar and venerates it with a kiss. Then, if appropriate, he incenses the cross and the altar, walking around the latter.
276. Thurification or incensation is an expression of reverence and of prayer, as is signified in Sacred Scripture (cf. Ps 140 [141]:2, Rev 8:3).
Incense may be used optionally in any form of Mass:
 - a) during the Entrance Procession;

- b) at the beginning of Mass, to incense the cross and the altar; ...
277. The Priest, having put incense into the thurible, blesses it with the Sign of the Cross, without saying anything.
 Before and after an incensation, a profound bow is made to the person or object that is incensed, except for the altar and the offerings for the Sacrifice of the Mass.
 Three swings of the thurible are used to incense the Most Blessed Sacrament, a relic of the Holy Cross and images of the Lord exposed for public veneration, the offerings for the Sacrifice of the Mass, the altar cross, the Book of the Gospels, the paschal candle, the Priest, and the people.
 Two swings of the thurible are used to incense relics and images of the Saints exposed for public veneration; this should be done, however, only at the beginning of the celebration, following the incensation of the altar.
 The altar is incensed with a series of single swings of the thurible in this way:
- a) if the altar is freestanding with respect to the wall, the Priest incenses walking around it;
 - b) if the altar is not freestanding, the Priest incenses it while walking first to the right hand side, then to the left.
- The cross, if situated on or near the altar, is incensed by the Priest before he incenses the altar; otherwise, he incenses it when he passes in front of it.

REFLECTION

The altar “is by its very nature a table of sacrifice and at the same time a table of the paschal banquet” (*Dedication of a Church and an Altar*, Chapter IV, no. 4). It is the symbol of Christ as well as of the whole Christian community since “Christians who give themselves to prayer, who offer petitions to God and present sacrifices of supplication, are the living stones from which the Lord Jesus builds the Church’s altar” (*ibid.*, no. 2). The veneration of the altar at the beginning of the celebration is an act of greeting which recalls that the common table is holy and sacred to the action of the assembly. It is the place from which prayer ascends like incense before God (see Psalm 141:2). It is venerated by the presiding priest in the name of all.

SUGGESTED QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

1. What is the purpose of kissing and incensing the altar?
2. Are there other ways of venerating the altar?
3. Is the altar treated with reverence both within and outside the liturgical celebration?
4. How would you characterize the usual manner of kissing the altar: hurried? embarrassed? loving? deliberate?
5. What makes the use of incense at the beginning of the celebration an appropriate sign for a given occasion?
6. Does this incensation duplicate any other incensations in the Mass?
7. Is the cross to be incensed?
8. Where is the processional cross placed after the procession?
9. Is there a danger of using the altar as a resting place for cruets, towels, pieces of paper, etc.?

5 SIGN OF THE CROSS; GREETING; INTRODUCTION

HISTORICAL SURVEY

Signing with the cross was a gesture practiced by Christians as early as the second century. By the late fourth century this action was incorporated at many points within the celebration of the sacraments. And yet a signing at the beginning of Mass appeared in the Roman Liturgy only with the medieval introduction of the prayers at the foot of the altar, i.e., private prayers originally said by the Priest on the way to the sanctuary.

A greeting extended by the presiding minister, on the other hand, is among the most ancient elements of the introductory rites. At Rome it served as an introduction to the opening prayer of the Mass.

The Order of Mass presents three options for the presider's greeting. The first, *The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ ...* is the conclusion of St. Paul's Second Letter to the Corinthians (13:13) and is found in some eastern liturgies as introducing the dialogue beginning the Eucharistic Prayer. The second option, *Grace to you and peace ...* is a formula often used by St. Paul to begin his letters, e.g., Galatians 1:3. The third option, also a text with biblical origins, is a traditional formula in the west (and also in Egypt): *The Lord be with you*. Although these words appear as a greeting in Ruth 2:4, they are more often found as a simple statement of God's presence in those who are being addressed, e.g., Judges 6:12.

The people's response to the greeting is identical in each of the three options: *Et cum spiritu tuo*, a response having many parallels in St. Paul, e.g., Galatians 6:18, yet its liturgical meaning appears to be more than a simple expression of good will—the minister is the one whose spirit has received the Spirit of God in Ordination and who thereby is a special “servant of Christ” (I Corinthians 4:1). The new translation of the Order of Mass gives a very literal translation of the response, namely, *And with your spirit*.

The Order of Mass allows for the presiding priest or some suitable minister to give a short introduction to the celebration. There is no written evidence attesting a similar practice in the early Church.

DOCUMENTATION

General Instruction of the Roman Missal, Third Edition

50. When the Entrance Chant is concluded, the Priest stands at the chair and, together with the whole gathering, signs himself with the Sign of the Cross. Then by means of the Greeting he signifies the presence of the Lord to the assembled community. By this greeting and the people's response, the mystery of the Church gathered together is made manifest. After the greeting of the people, the Priest, or the Deacon, or a lay minister may very briefly introduce the faithful to the Mass of the day.
124. Once all this has been done, the Priest goes to the chair. When the Entrance Chant is concluded, with everybody standing, the Priest and faithful, sign themselves with the Sign of the Cross. The Priest says: *In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit*. The people reply, *Amen*. Then, facing the people and extending his hands, the Priest greets the people, using one of the formulas indicated. The Priest himself or some other minister may also very briefly introduce the faithful to the Mass of the day.

31. Likewise it is also for the Priest, in the exercise of his office of presiding over the gathered assembly, to offer certain explanations that are foreseen in the rite itself. ... He is permitted, furthermore, in a very few words, to give the faithful an introduction to the Mass of the day (after the initial Greeting and before the Penitential Act) ...

REFLECTION

The sign of the cross, a traditional prelude to prayer, is a form of self-blessing with strong baptismal overtones: in the rite of Christian initiation a person is signed with the cross, for it is from the victorious Cross of Jesus Christ that salvation comes to us. Moreover, every Christian has been baptized in the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. The community at worship is first and foremost a baptismal community, and for this reason can gather to celebrate the Lord Jesus.

Romano Guardini (1885–1968), the noted German theologian, wrote: “When we cross ourselves, let it be with a real sign of the cross ... let us make a large, unhurried sign, from forehead to breast, from shoulder to shoulder, consciously feeling how it includes the whole of us ... It is the holiest of all signs” (*Sacred Signs*, St. Louis, 1956, p. 13ff.).

The Greeting, which is much more than a friendly “Good morning,” is both a formalized announcement and wish that the people actually experience the presence and power of the Lord in the community they form. Since Christ is present in the assembly and in its members, the Greeting and the congregation’s response express “the mystery of the Church gathered together” (GIRM, no. 50).

The introduction, always very brief, should not be a duplication of the Greeting, much less a mini-homily. It may focus upon the special character of the celebration or upon those who are present.

SUGGESTED QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

1. Where does the priest stand after he greets the altar?
2. What is the purpose of the sign of the cross?
3. Does the celebration actually begin with the sign of the cross?
4. How is the sign of the cross made?
5. Might it ever be effective to sing the sign of the cross?
6. What is the purpose of the Greeting?
7. What forms does it take?
8. Does it actually convey the feeling of welcome?
9. Should the greeting be read from the Missal?
10. What type of gesture is used to accompany it?
11. Is it appropriate for the celebrant to extend an informal greeting either before or after the formal Greeting?
12. What is the purpose of the introduction?
13. By whom is it given?
14. Can introductions be misused?
15. What is the role of creativity in these structural elements?
16. Are they ever unduly prolonged?