

## **Our Lady of Perpetual Help The Rubrics of the Mass Explained**

English-speaking Roman Catholics have been celebrating Mass with a newly revised translation of the Roman Missal since Advent 2011. During this time of transition has given us an opportunity to deepen our relationships with the Lord and one another. Below you will find an explanation of the parts of the Mass to assist you in learning more about the Mass and the changes that have occurred with the implementation of the third edition of the Roman Missal. This explanation was written by Fr. Victor De Gagné.

### **Preparation for Mass**

#### **-The Gathering of the Community**

The celebration of Mass begins with the Parish community gathering together. From far and wide Catholics from all walks of life, backgrounds and vocations come together for a single purpose. More importantly we are coming from someplace: from the many varied activities of the week, both those that have put their faith into action, and those that have sadly lured them away from Christ. And so, we come as we are: rich and poor, happy and sad, male and female, tired and energetic and form the holy people of God where Christ becomes present: "For where two or more gather in my name, there I will be in their midst" (Matthew 18.20). Our worship of God first begins in our preparation at home (fasting an hour before Mass) and in our gathering as a community in our parish church to acknowledge the events of the past week and to receive strength for the week ahead. Before Mass begins, while at church, we are to prepare ourselves in silent prayer-reviewing the readings before Mass.

### **Part I: Introductory Rites**

The Mass consists of four parts: Introductory Rites, the Liturgy of the Word, the Liturgy of the Eucharist, and the Concluding Rites. The Introductory Rites consist of everything from the beginning of the Entrance Song to the conclusion of the Collect.

Through song, reflection and prayer, these rites serve to open the Mass and to prepare our hearts and souls to listen attentively to the Word of God and to then feast at the table of the Eucharist. It is likened to what happened to the disciples on the way to Emmaus, in the opening of the Scriptures and in the breaking of bread, their eyes were opened, and they recognized Christ in their midst.

#### **-The Entrance Song**

Hymns and singing have always been part of Christian worship. According to the Gospels of Matthew and Mark, the Last Supper concluded with a hymn. As early as the 6<sup>th</sup> century, Sunday Mass has always opened and concluded with hymns of praise to God. Singing lifts our hearts, minds and voices in prayer. St. Augustine once remarked: "They who sing, pray twice." With the new edition of the Roman Missal, every prayer of the Mass has been set to music.

### **-The Entrance Procession**

The meaning of the Entrance Procession comes from the image of Christ the Good Shepherd. What sets apart a good shepherd from others is his place in the midst of the flock. A good shepherd is always found at the end of the flock, for it is from there that he can keep a watchful eye out for danger, and from where he can recognize and tend to the needs of the sheep and when necessary carry them on his shoulders when they grow weary. It is for this reason that the priest, who by his ordination stands in the place of Christ the Good Shepherd, is last in the procession. It is a reminder of the priest's role in the community, to lead, serve, care for and protect God's people, and at the same time a reminder to the people that they never walk alone through the trials and joys of life. In the entrance procession, is included the Gospel book, which is the life of Jesus we are called to follow and live. Altar servers carrying incense (if used), the processional cross and candles lead the procession to the altar. If a deacon is present, he follows carrying the Book of Gospels and then the priest.

### **-The Veneration of the Altar**

A series of gestures shows respect for the altar, which since the 4<sup>th</sup> century has been the primary symbol of Christ in the church building. The lay ministers bow to it, the priest kisses it and he may also incense it. The kissing of the altar comes from the time when Christianity was still outlawed in the Roman Empire and Mass was secretly celebrated in the catacombs on the tombs of the martyrs. By kissing the tomb, the priest honoured the one who gave his/ her life for the Faith. When Christianity became the religion of the Empire in 313 AD, the kissing of the altar continued as a reminder of the high price that was paid so that we could worship God in public free from fear. It is also for this reason that the practice of placing relics of saints inside the altar of sacrifice continues to this day.

### **-The Sign of the Cross**

Following the veneration of the altar, the priest goes to his chair and opens the Mass with the Sign of the Cross. The Sign of the Cross is the first gesture that we as Catholics make to begin and end our prayer, as it reminds us of the two most important facts of our faith: The God we worship is a trinity of persons: Father, Son and Holy Spirit; and by the power of the Cross we have been redeemed. The Sign of the Cross is a prayer in itself and a blessing, calling upon the God who created, redeemed and sanctifies us to be with us always.

### **-The Greeting**

Following the Sign of the Cross, the priest greets the people in the name of Christ. All of the greetings are inspired by Scripture: either from the Old Testament (see Judges 6.12; Ruth 2.4; and 2 Chronicles 15.2) or from the introduction of Paul's Letters (see 1 Corinthians 1.3; 2 Corinthians 13.14; Romans 1.7, Galatians 1.3; Ephesians 1.2; Philippians 1.2).

The people's response to the greeting is also taken from Scripture. The use of the word "spirit" in the people's response, connects the greeting to its biblical roots, its historical usage, and the religious nature of the events about to take place. The word "spirit" does not refer to the soul of the priest but to the Spirit he has received through ordination. The greeting signifies that the Church in its fullness is gathered for worship and that Christ is present in our midst.

### **-The Penitential Act**

For the first thousand years, there is little evidence of a penitential act during Mass. It was only in 1570 AD, that this act of repentance as we know it today, was included in the Mass. The Penitential Act finds its basis from the First Letter of John (1.9): "If we confess our sins, he who is faithful and just will forgive us our sins and cleanse us from all unrighteousness." The Penitential Act opens with an introduction by the priest calling upon the entire community to acknowledge their sins before the Lord, which we do in silence. This moment of silence is intended as a weekly examination of our lives. Ask yourself this question: "What is the one major thing that has kept me from God this week?" Then all present join in a general confession of sin, which is usually the Confiteor prayer ("I confess to almighty God..."). The words to the Confiteor have repeatedly changed since 1570 AD, however its purpose has always reminded the same: to acknowledge our sins and to ask forgiveness from the Lord.

### **-The Kyrie**

The origins of the Kyrie (Lord, have mercy) are unclear, however it was firmly in place as a hymn since the time when Gregory the Great was pope (590 – 604 AD). It was often used as a conclusion to the Psalms and for processions. When Latin became the official language of the Church, the Kyrie was the only prayer that was retained in its original Greek and not translated into Latin. The Kyrie was never intended to be penitential in nature and is not connected to repentance. After repenting of our sin and asking for forgiveness in the Penitential Act, we join in singing or saying this ancient hymn celebrating God's mercy and goodness that he has showered upon us.

### **-The Gloria**

The first recorded use of the Gloria dates back to the 3<sup>rd</sup> century as a hymn for morning prayer. By the 8<sup>th</sup> century, the Gloria was sung at Masses at which the bishop presided and during the Christmas and Easter seasons. The Gloria probably originated as a Christmas hymn since its first line is taken the angels' announcement of the Saviour's birth to the shepherds (see Luke 2.14). The Gloria is a hymn of joy and celebration, and therefore is only sung at Masses during the Christmas and Easter seasons and Ordinary Time. It is omitted during the seasons of Advent and Lent. By this hymn, the faithful gathered in the Holy Spirit, praise God.

### **-The Collect**

The priest's invitation "Let us pray," leads everyone into a moment of silence, during which they offer the prayers they bring to Mass. What is in your heart as you come to Mass today? In what areas of your life can you use God's grace or strength? Is there anyone whom you wish to pray for? During this time, the priest may again silently remember the Mass intention. Then extending his hands, the priest gathers all these prayers together and offers them to God by saying a formal prayer. This silence and prayer are called the Collect; for the priest "collects" the prayers of the people and offers them to God. This is symbolized in the extending of the priest's hands upwards. The Collect concludes the Introductory Rites. The Liturgy of the Word is the first major part of the Mass. The proclamation of the Scriptures has always been a part of Christian worship. Its basis comes from the Jewish tradition of reading the Torah in the synagogue; as well as Luke's account of the journey to

Emmaus, in which two disciples converse with Jesus though unaware it is him. Along the way, Jesus explains the Scriptures, and then when he breaks the bread they recognize him for who he is. The Second Vatican Council expanded the readings from Scripture that we hear at Mass. Before Vatican II, we heard less than 1% of the Old Testament and 17% from the New Testament. Now we hear 14% of the Old Testament and 71% of the New Testament and the entire four Gospels over a three-year cycle. This three-year cycle for Gospel readings was chosen to reflect the duration of Jesus' public ministry of three years.

### **-The First Reading**

The Scripture readings are always proclaimed from the ambo. During the readings, the assembly is called upon to sit and listen to the Word being proclaimed. The Scriptures were not meant for just private devotion, but primarily for public proclamation. God speaks to his people in the proclamation of the Word, not in the silent reading along with the lector. The First Reading is always taken from the Old Testament, except during the Easter Season when it is taken from the Acts of the Apostles. The selection of the First Reading is chosen in relation to the Gospel; thus, these two readings always share the same theme. In the silence that follows the reading, ask yourself: "What phrase or image stuck with me from the reading, and what is God saying to me through it?"

### **-The Responsorial Psalm**

The Psalm is called "responsorial" because of its structure; it is designed to be sung in alternation between the psalmist and the congregation. The Psalm is chosen based upon one of themes of the first or second readings or the Gospel. It is meant to allow the people to meditate on the Word of God and the theme for that day. Since the Psalms are part of Sacred Scripture, it is always sung from the ambo: the place reserved for the proclamation of the Scriptures. The Second Vatican Council restored the use of the term "psalmist" for the title of the person who sings the Psalm. This title was used in the early Church but fell out of use during the 19<sup>th</sup> century in favour of the title "cantor."

### **-The Second Reading**

The second reading from Scripture is always taken from one of the letters contained in the New Testament. It is a sequential proclamation of the letter and therefore it does not follow the theme of the first reading or the Gospel. The importance of the second reading lies in the fact that it often describes the challenges that the early Christians faced and shows the development of Christian practice, doctrine and community. It gives us a guide for right living as many of the challenges then, are challenges that we still face today. In the silence that follows the reading, ask yourself: "What image or phrase stuck with me from the reading, and what is God saying to me through it?"

### **-The Gospel Acclamation**

This acclamation announces the coming of the Gospel and accompanies the procession to the ambo. In all of the liturgical seasons except Lent the "Alleluia" is sung, which means "Praise God" in Hebrew. The acclamation finds its origins in Jewish worship prior to the proclamation of the Scripture readings from the Torah. Since the first Christians were Jewish, they carried this practice into Christian worship. Since it is a acclamation of great joy, it is omitted during Lent as it is out of character with the penitential nature of the

Lenten season. It exists to call to mind the importance of the Gospel in which Christ himself speaks to his people. The Gospel Acclamation is always sung; if it cannot be sung then it is omitted.

### **-The Gospel**

Several marks of respect are given to the Gospel to indicate how important it is within the Church. Since the time of the Apostles, we have believed that when the Gospel is proclaimed, it is Christ himself who speaks to his people. For this reason, only an ordained minister proclaims the Gospel. This designation goes back to the 3<sup>rd</sup> century when Cyprian ordained Aurelian a deacon for this specific purpose. Before proclaiming the Gospel, the deacon asks a blessing from the priest that the Lord be “in his heart and on his lips” that by his proclamation the people may come to fall in love with the Scriptures and marvel at the work of Jesus who saves us from our sins. Immediately before the proclamation of the Gospel, everyone makes the sign of the cross three times over their bodies, once on the forehead, on the lips and over the heart. These signings number three for the Trinity: one God revealed in three Persons. The areas of the body that we sign with the cross are also significant: the forehead, that we may always reflect and meditate on the Gospel; the lips, that we may always proclaim the Word of God in our speech; the heart, that the Gospel may dwell there by faith. The proclamation of the Gospel has a preeminent place among all the readings of Scripture. While all the readings form the Word of God, God speaks directly and clearly to his people through the words and actions of Jesus in the Gospel. It is for this reason that we stand during the Gospel, out of respect and veneration for Christ who is made present in our midst. The response “Praise to you, Lord Jesus Christ” at the conclusion of the proclamation of the Gospel affirms our belief in the presence of Christ in the Gospel.

### **-The Homily**

The homily is to be based on the Scriptures of the day or of the liturgical texts used for Mass, to encourage and challenge the people to live the Christian life. The homily has its origins in the story of Jesus with the disciples of Emmaus, where he explained the Scriptures to them before breaking bread with them. Many of the Church Fathers are remembered for their homilies and how they brought together the practice of the Faith in the daily lives of Christians. Homilies vary in quality from preacher to preacher and Sunday to Sunday; yet the purpose reminds the same: applying the Scriptures to the daily practice of our faith. A homily is mandatory for Sunday and Holy Days of Obligation, but optional for a weekday Mass.

### **-Time of Silence**

Following the Gospel, there is a prolonged moment of silent reflection on the readings and the homily. This moment of silence while always part of the Mass, was usually skipped over. Now with the recent changes to the Mass, the Church has been reminded of the importance of this moment of silence. Through singing, proclamation and prayer we give praise and glory to God. In silence God speaks to us. What image or phrase from the readings or the homily struck you? What direction does it give you in life? Does it help you make a decision?

### **-The Profession of Faith**

Our Creed, appears in two forms in the new edition of the Roman Missal; the Nicene Creed and the Apostles' Creed and is recited at every Sunday Mass. The Apostles' Creed is normally recited during Lent and Easter as it is the creed used at Baptism which is usually celebrated during Easter. The Nicene Creed is generally used throughout the remainder of the year. The Creed has been recited during the Mass since the year 589 AD. Through it, week by week, generation after generation, the faith of the Church is handed on and unites Catholics in the one Faith that we all share.

### **-Nicene Creed – “Consubstantial”**

In the Nicene Creed we now say that Jesus is “consubstantial” instead of “one in Being” with the Father. It is the literal translation of the Greek word *homoousios* (or in Latin *consubstantialis*) which is used in the Creed. Consubstantial means “having the same substance” and is only used by the Church to describe Jesus' relationship to the Father. The question of how Jesus relates to the Father has great importance. Heresies have divided Christians over this issue and the Council of Nicaea in 325 AD coined this word to precisely articulate the nature of this relationship. By it, the Church expresses that the divinity of Jesus is the same divinity of the Father. “Consubstantial” is an important word; it was fought over by theologians and bishops for centuries as they sought the best word to clarify this great truth about Jesus. It deserves our respect and attention.

### **-Apostles' Creed – “descended into hell”**

The phrase that Jesus “descended into hell” in the Apostles' Creed has caused much concern for some people. “Hell” in popular culture is the place of devils and eternal damnation for all who reject God. However; in the Bible, it refers to the place where the souls of all the dead went before the Resurrection of Jesus. In the Bible, the Hebrew name for this place is *Sheol* and in Greek it is called *Hades*, which in English is literally translated as *Hell*. This phrase in the creed, describes the work that Christ was doing while his body lay in the tomb. Prior to the Resurrection, no one was able to go to heaven due to original sin. In order to save those who died before him, Jesus although without sin, took on sin and willingly experienced its effects which is death. Thus, he went to the place of the dead (or to *Sheol* or *Hades* or *Hell*) to retrieve the souls of all the just to take them to heaven. By dying, Jesus brought salvation to all those who died before his Resurrection; and by rising from the dead, they ascended into heaven with him. There are numerous Biblical references to this mystery of the Faith: the main ones are Psalm 68; Acts 2.31; Romans 10.7; Ephesians 4.8-10; 1 Peter 3.18-19; Hebrews 2.14-15; Matthew 12.40; and Revelation 1.17-18 among many others.

### **-The Universal Prayer**

We have come to know this part of the Mass as the Prayers of the Faithful, for by it the baptized offer prayers and intercessions for the Church, for the salvation of the world, for all in need and for the local community. This practice of praying for specific groups is recommended in the First Letter to Timothy. The revised instruction on the Mass insists that the petitions be offered by a deacon when present. This underscores the ministry of the deacon, as he is primarily responsible for charity in the community therefore the one who would be most aware of local needs.