



Pastor's Column

St. Peter Catholic Church

December 9, 2018, Second Sunday of Advent

The Mass Explained - Introductory Rites

Last week, we began our Pastor Column series on the Mass explained, and we started with the Entrance Procession and related aspects. Today, we consider the Introductory Rites.

The Sign of the Cross that we all do together is the official beginning of the Mass itself. The Sign of the Cross is our most basic blessing, our most fundamental prayer. We trace the Cross over our bodies because we are Christian, and Christ suffered and died on the Cross for our redemption and salvation. We all do it together as a sign that we are all in this together; our faith in a communal faith, and we are a family in faith. And we say the Holy Name of the three Persons of the Holy Trinity (Father, Son, and Holy Spirit) because God is three-in-one, and the Trinity is one of the most important and most foundational dogmas of the Church. Therefore, the Sign of the Cross is a kind of synthesis of our faith.

Then follows the Greeting. The priest celebrant addresses the congregation using the words of Saint Paul himself, with which he began many of his own inspired writings. And the people's response ("And with your spirit.") invites us all to acknowledge the role of the Holy Spirit in the Mass, in Whose age we are and Whose temples we are.

Then follows the Penitential Rite. Even in the state of grace, we recognize that we are fallen, broken human beings, that we are sinners faced always with temptation and near occasions of sin. Therefore, it is right and just that we begin our celebration by calling to mind our sins and begging the Lord for the grace and blessing of His mercy and forgiveness.

One form of the Penitential Rite is the *Confiteor* ("I confess..."). Here, we acknowledge sins of commission ("what we have done") and sins of omission ("what we have failed to do"). And we strike our breast three times in sorrow for having sinned, like the tax collector who stood off at a distance in the temple area, beating his breast and praying, "O God, be merciful to me, a sinner." We invoke the prayers of every angel, every saint, every brother and sister in Christ, to come to our aid so as to pray with us and for us for God's mercy.

The other common form of the Penitential Rite is the *Kyrie*. This three-fold begging for mercy (though each trope is addressed specifically to God the Son) readily brings to mind and our attention to the triune God. There are options for phrases to be spoken with each trope, each of these options reflecting some aspect of the Paschal Mystery. For example, one option for a *Kyrie* trope is, "You are Son of God and Son of Mary." This trope reflects the mystery of the God-man, the Incarnation of God in the Person of Jesus Christ.

The *Gloria* follows (outside of Advent and Lent). How appropriate that immediately after we acknowledge our sinfulness and beg the Lord's mercy that we go right into the song of the angels who, in spite of our sinfulness (or rather because of it) came to us to proclaim to us the Good News of great joy that is for all the people: Christ Jesus has come to save us from the sins that we have just now acknowledged and from which we have just now repented.

Then follows the Collect (the Opening Prayer). The priest celebrant's call, "Let us pray," is a summons for us to collect our thoughts and prayers, to allow ourselves to be collected into one prayer that begins the liturgical celebration of the Mass. Every Collect follows the same basic pattern: we address God; we acknowledge something that God has done and/or continues to do for us; we ask God for a specific grace or blessing; we appeal to God through Jesus Christ, Who with the Father and the Holy Spirit is one God forever and ever.

~ Fr. Lewis