

# I. Introductory Rites: Forming a Community for Worship

## An Introduction to this series of articles

The newest iteration of the *General Instruction of the Roman Missal* (GIRM) appeared in 2003 and differs from earlier versions in its emphases. And in 2011 the more recent translation of the Mass, the *Roman Missal*, was introduced to the English-speaking world. I have found it a good practice to reflect regularly on these documents. I trust you will find this study fruitful as well.

*Institutio Generalis*, or "General Instruction," refers to the introductory material in the Roman Missal, the Sacramentary. All Rites after Vatican II, have an *Institutio*. They each provide the theological and pastoral context for the instructions and rubrics.

## It is good for us to be here.

The 2003 *Institutio* characterizes the Introductory Rites as beginning, introducing, and preparing worshipers to enter the liturgy. Their purpose is: "that the faithful coming together, take on the form of a community and prepare themselves to listen attentively to God's word and to celebrate the Eucharist worthily." (GIRM, 46)

The *Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy* (CSL, 1964), the source document for GIRM, spoke about the presence of Christ in the liturgy in terms of *one* Christ and *four* interrelated ways in which he is present: Christ is present in the priest-presider, in the Word proclaimed, most especially in the Eucharist, and in "the Church that prays and sings." (CSL 7) ["For where two or three are gathered together in my name..." (Mt.18:20)]

So, the Spirit calls individuals together. People respond. Then the liturgy forms those who gathered into a community to listen and celebrate.

Again, the Spirit gathers us; the liturgy constitutes the assembly that manifests the Body of Christ alive and active in the world *today*.

"In the restoration and promotion of the sacred liturgy *the full and active participation by all the people is the aim to be considered before all else...*" (CSL 14)

The liturgy signifies "the action of Christ and the Church" (GIRM 20) through the "full, active, and conscious participation of the faithful," which is *how* the assembly manifests Christ at worship.

The second important element to notice in GIRM 46 how it describes the *purpose* of the Introductory Rites. They are the *means by which we prepare to*

hear the Word of God and celebrate the Eucharist worthily. I need to comment on 'worthily'.

The Greek word used in the bible, *hikanós*, usually is translated 'worthy'. However, it basically means 'adequate, sufficient, enough.' So, we celebrate Eucharist adequately saying, "*Lord I am not enough...*"

## How do we begin?

### *The Introductory Rites include:*

The Entrance Song  
The Greeting  
The Rite of Sprinkling of Holy Water (or)  
The Penitential Rite (includes three forms)  
The *Kyrie*  
The Glory to God  
The Opening Prayer.

Some among us old are enough to remember the Latin Mass and how the *Prayers at the Foot of the Altar* looked like the beginning. Yet they were the priest's private, personal preparation *before* the beginning of Mass. In the Tridentine Rite, Mass began *after* the priest's private prayers at the *Collect*, or Opening Prayer.

## What is the purpose of the Introductory Rites?

"The purpose of these rites is that the faithful who are assembling should *become a community* and *dispose themselves to listen properly to God's word and to celebrate the Eucharist worthily...*" (GIRM 46)

The Introductory Rites succeed in their purpose as the gathering of disparate individuals forms into a conscious, worshipping community ready to listen and celebrate. The oneness of the community in prayer and song adequately manifests Christ's presence.

## Beginning well: Call to Worship

It is interesting how GIRM does not concern itself with those moments before 'beginning'. I support the call to worship to invite distinct individuals to a moment of silence to promote coming together as a worshipping community: "Let us call to mind the presence of God around us... [pause] Let the Church rise and begin!"

## Standing to sing is a theological act.

The faithful rise to begin singing the praises of the Father with the Son and in the Spirit. The dead don't stand. Sleepers awake when called. Standing reveals the Body of Christ in the world as awake and alive. Singing signifies a foretaste of the glorious praise of God on the Last Day (Revelations 5:6ff)

## The Entrance Song

The Entrance Song forms individuals into a community able to participate in the action that

follows and reveals the presence of Christ. GIRM 47 describes the four-fold purpose of the Opening Song:

"After the people have gathered, the entrance chant begins as the priest enters with the deacon and ministers. The purpose of singing at this time is to *open the celebration, intensify the unity* of those who have assembled, *lead their thoughts* to the mystery of the liturgical season or festivity, and *accompany the procession* of the priest and ministers." (Italics added.)

### Sign of the Cross and Greeting

In a similar way, the sign of the cross and greeting by the priest-presider *with the faithful's response* make known the mystery of the Church. How?

"Then through the greeting the priest signifies the presence of the Lord to the community gathered together. *By this greeting and the people's response the mystery of the Church gathered together is made known.*" (GIRM 48)

### The Penitential Rite

The current Roman Missal offers the priest-presider two options - the Penitential Rite or the Rite of Blessing and Sprinkling with Holy Water. The liturgical season dictates the choice.

"On Sundays, especially in the Season of Easter, in place of the customary Act of Penitence, from time to time *the blessing and sprinkling of water to recall Baptism may take place.*" (GIRM 51)

It is helpful to recall that the Introductory Rites may be omitted if another ritual is celebrated at Mass following the Word (e.g., infant baptism).

The presider may choose from three options for the Penitential Rite: The *Confiteor*, a shorter litany, and/or the *Kyrie Eleison* or *Lord, have mercy*.

"Since [the Lord, have mercy] *is a chant by which the faithful acclaim the Lord and implore his mercy*, It is ordinarily done by all, that is, by the people and with the choir or cantor having a part in it." (GIRM 52)

The *Kyrie* acclaims the mercy of God, its first meaning. It asks for mercy in the second place. It is a time to glorify Christ who loves us and knows us deeply. Consult the invocations made available to the presider in the back of the *Roman Missal*.

### A Clarification regarding the Penitential Rite

Rome eventually came to believe the Penitential Rite was being understood wrongly and so distinguished the presider's prayer after the *Confiteor* from the absolution given in Confession.

"Then the priest invites them to take part in the penitential rite, which, after a brief pause for silence, the entire community carries out through a formula of general confession, and which is concluded with the priest's absolution. *This latter, however, lacks the efficacy of the sacrament of penance.*" (GIRM #51)

### The Glory to God

The *Gloria* is an ancient text, a non-biblical "psalm" based on New Testament hymns (as *Te Deum* and *Phos Hilaron*) originally composed for private prayer during the second and third centuries. St. Hilary of Poitiers has been credited with translating the text from Greek into Latin (fourth century). It wasn't until the sixth century that Rome adopted the *Gloria* for Christmas Mass.

It is a vitally Trinitarian prayer that praises God for divine mercy shown throughout salvation history. Today, the Western Church says or sings it during Easter season, Christmastide, and Ordinary Time, as well as on Solemnities; and fasts from it during Lent and Advent. Its place in the liturgy is so venerable that another hymn or text may not replace it.

### The Collect, or Opening Prayer

The priest says, "Let us pray," and the assembly prays in silence for a moment. At least, that's what the rubrics of the *Sacramentary* said. The *Roman Missal* left out this instruction to pause for silence at the Opening Prayer, which creates some dissonance with the *General Instruction*. St. John Paul II had several paragraphs inserted in GIRM2003 that specifically stressed silence during the liturgy.

"All, together with the priest, *observe a brief silence so that they may realize they are in God's presence and may call their petitions to mind.* Then the priest speaks the prayer, which custom has named "the collect" *and through which the character of the celebration is expressed.*" (GIRM 54)

Collect, the new term used by the *Missal*, shows the need for silence – for the faithful to hold our petitions in mind. The presider collects all these into one prayer to the Father.

### For discussion/reflection:

- In your experience, at what point in the liturgy are you ready to be present to God, to others, to the prayer? To listen to the Word & celebrate Eucharist?
- What new did you learn from this article?
- What else might wish to understand to be able to enter into the Introductory Rites?
- How does your parish build a worshipping community at Mass? Outside Mass?
  - What are its strong points? What could be strengthened?

This is the first in a series of articles about the liturgy. Article #2 will present *Hearing the Word*.