

## A Note from the Pastor

Dear Parishioners,

**By the grace of God, I am in Rome this weekend (five days total), so I have decided to print most of a December 21, 2017 article by the Catholic News Service, reporting the words of someone I plan to see while I am away.**

VATICAN CITY (CNS) - Don't be late for Mass believing the introductory rites do not matter, Pope Francis told visitors and pilgrims.

The words and gestures that open the celebration help the faithful come together as one and prepare them to listen to the Word of God and celebrate the Eucharist worthily, he said during his weekly general audience.

“It is not a good habit to be looking at the clock” and calculating how much of the beginning of Mass would be OK to miss and still fulfill one's obligation, he said.

Get to Mass early – not late, he said, because it is during the introductory rites that “we begin to adore God as a community” and “to prepare the heart for this celebration with the community.”

The Pope continued his series of audience talks on the Mass, reflecting on the introductory rites. “Understanding these holy signs is necessary in order to fully experience the Mass and savour all of its beauty,” he said.

The gestures that accompany the Mass “risk going unnoticed,” he said, but they “are very significant because they express from the start that the Mass is an encounter of love with Christ,” who offers his body on the cross, becoming victim and priest.

After the entrance, the celebrant bows and kisses the altar as an expression of veneration because the altar is a symbol of Christ, the Pope said.

Everyone gathers around the altar, “not to look at each other. No. But to look at Christ,” who is at the center of the community – not far away.

With the sign of the cross, the priest and assembly recognize the liturgy is carried out “in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit.” It is a sign of the mystery of the Trinity, of Christ's loving sacrifice and resurrection, and of each person's baptism, he said.

Pope Francis again urged parents and grandparents to teach children from a very young age how to make the sign of the cross properly and what it means. He said so often it looks like kids are just gesturing “a picture of something” that is definitely not a cross. “Explain to them that they will have Jesus's cross as protection,” he added.

The celebrant will then greet the assembly, for example, with “The Lord be with you,” and the assembly's response, “And with your spirit,” shows the community of God in dialogue, he said...

The penitential act following the greeting invites all those gathered to recognize their sins and ask for forgiveness.

It is more than a moment of self-reflection, he said; it is “an invitation to admit that one is a sinner before God and before the community of brothers and sisters with humility and sincerity, like the publican at the temple.”

Since the Mass makes present Christ's passage from death to life, the Pope said, “the first thing we have to do is recognize our situations of death in order to be able to rise up with him toward a new life.”

Sincerely in Christ,

**P.S. I will be praying for all of you while I am in Rome.**

