

Understanding the Mass

Part 5 in a series

The Introductory Rites continued

As the procession continues we are all singing the opening hymn to show our love for God. The procession then reaches the area at the foot of the elevated area known as the Sanctuary; literally, a holy place (from the Latin *Sanctuarium*). In reverence to the altar and the tabernacle where the body of Christ is in repose (located behind the altar on the rear wall in our church) the ministers make a solemn bow. The priest and deacon also bow or genuflect and proceed directly to the altar where the Book of the Gospels is placed by the deacon. The priest and deacon then venerate the altar with a kiss (as a sign of respect) and, along with the altar servers, proceed directly to their respective chairs. All the while, we are singing praises to our God.

The Mass has begun and our attention has now been drawn to the priest. He (and we) again make the sign of the cross signifying our belief in the Holy Trinity by pronouncing the names of the three Divine Persons: The Father, The Son, and the Holy Spirit. This simple gesture should also immediately bring to mind the sacrifice Jesus made for us on the cross to save us from our sin. We all respond with a resounding “Amen”. We do this because we are affirming our faith in the presence of the Lord.

The Greeting

The priest opens with a greeting from the words of St. Paul, “The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the communion of the Holy Spirit be with you all.” (2 Corinthians 13:13) If the Bishop is presiding he will open with the words of Jesus, “Peace be with you.” (John 20:26) Both greetings invoke God’s peace upon us. It is a reminder to put aside our fears or concerns while we are in His presence.

We reply with “And with your Spirit” which is also from St. Paul’s letters (2 Timothy 4:22 and Galatians 6:18). At an early point in the Church this reply was restricted in its use to the ordained. It is a way of recognizing the presence of the Holy Spirit, conferred on the priest or deacon at their ordination and present at the Mass. Many of the greetings used throughout the Mass are derived from Scripture, as we will see as we continue this series.