

Understanding the Mass

Part 4 in a series

The Mass begins! Participation, not observation!”

We have said our prayers and meditated on them and are now ready for the Mass to begin. For most of us the Mass starts when we hear the bells ring indicating we should stand for the opening hymn. However, I would like to take you back just a little and let you know how the Priest, Deacon, Altar Servers, Extraordinary Ministers and Lectors prepare for their participation in the Mass.

Prior to the start of the Mass, the Priest and Deacon will go to the Sacristy to put on their liturgical attire, called *Vestments*. This process is called *Vesting*. As each garment is put on, the priest and deacon say a specific prayer. For example, when the white Alb is put on they pray, *“Purify me Lord, and cleanse my heart so that, washed in the Blood of the Lamb, I may enjoy eternal bliss.”* Similar prayers are said as each vestment is applied. After the Altar Servers have vested with their Albs, they pray the Our Father. Next, the Priest, Deacon, Altar Servers, Extraordinary Ministers and Lectors gather in the Narthex as the priest opens with a prayer asking for God’s blessing for his servants.

The Mass begins.

The Mass is divided into two major parts: The *Liturgy of the Word* and the *Liturgy of the Eucharist*. Prior to these parts we have the *Introductory Rites*. The Introductory Rites are the formal start of the Mass and it begins with the ringing of the bells, the start of the opening hymn and the procession of the ministers. Up to this point we have been praying individually and everything has been between God and ourselves. Now, however, it is time to join with our community and worship our God together. We do this by actively singing the opening hymn! Now, you may say, “I don’t sing because I couldn’t carry a tune in a hand-basket!” Wrong! Sing anyway! With the opening hymn we are showing our love for God. We don’t all have extreme musical talent but we can all certainly join our voices as a community to praise our God. So remember, participate! Don’t just observe; sing!