



The Meaning of the Mass: Part Nine

by Fr. Brian Mahoney

THE GLORIA

The *Gloria* was first mentioned as part of the liturgy in the fourth century. The Roman Rite entered it into the celebration of the Christmas Mass in the sixth century. By the eighth century the *Gloria* had become a regular element in the celebration of Mass. The *Gloria* is therefore an ancient hymn of praise to the Father and to the Lamb. The *Gloria* is fit for this section because one of the fundamental purposes of liturgy is the worship of God. Beginning with this hymn of praise, the celebration recalls the object and purpose of our worship, and thus, prepares the faithful for what is to follow.

THE COLLECT

The final element in the Introductory Rites is the opening prayer, or Collect, which has been part of the Mass possibly as early as the fifth century. Some of the prayers used for the Collect are ancient and can be traced back to the time of Pope Leo I (fifth century) and earlier. As such, they enjoy great historical as well as theological merit. The General Instruction of the Roman Missal (GIRM) describes the Collect as both revealing the theme for the liturgy and as a petition to God. It states:

Next the priest invites the people to pray, and together they spend some moments in silence so they may realize that they are in God's presence and may make their petitions. The priest then says the prayer which is called the opening prayer or Collect. This expresses the theme of the celebration as well as a petition addressed to God the Father through the mediation of Christ in the Holy Spirit. (GIRM no. 32)

Thus, the prayer attempts to unite the community and its prayer, and provides a focus to the celebration. Ultimately, the celebration of the liturgy is about the Paschal Mystery, but this prayer helps the assembly to focus on certain aspects of that Mystery on particular feast days and seasons of the year. It also brings together the prayer of the community, uniting it as one and offering up the united prayer to God. This brings to an end the Introductory Rites, which may also be understood as a fitting preparation of the faithful to hear the proclamation of God's Word.

As we complete our examination of the Introductory Rites, we must remember that their ultimate purpose is to help us recognize the presence of God the Father and Christ in our midst. As such, we should be ready to hear and truly listen to the God who is about to speak to us in the Liturgy of the Word. The Introductory Rites are really about quieting us down and getting rid of distractions, so that we can pay attention to God who will be speaking to us through his scriptures. As we complete the Introductory Rites, it is important to recognize the difference of what is, and what is *not*, a true distraction. What we want to avoid is the 'laundry list', such as: after Mass I need to take this Suzie here or there, or I need to go food shopping, or do the laundry. What we should *not* see as distractions are those concerns we are truly wrestling with in our lives, such as, finances, relationship issues, health issues, and the like. Issues that are impacting our lives and that we need guidance on truly belong in our celebration. It may be the moment that we are most open to hearing what God is trying to tell us.