

OCTOBER 24, 2021: 30TH SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME



Teaching on the Mass: Part Two

During my first visit to Ireland, I wanted to go to the Saturday Vigil Mass. I was told growing up that you did not go late to Mass. When I arrived at the first Church, I could see that Mass had already started: they were finishing the Gloria—and I was only about three minutes late! It was clear to me that the priest was pretty quick. But, in Ireland, finding another Mass was not going to be difficult. The first Mass was at 4:00 and I discovered another Church nearby that had a Mass at 4:30. I practically ran there but I still arrived about three to four minutes late, and they were already at the end of the Gloria. I decided to try to find a 5:00 Mass. I found out where the next nearest church was, and I got lucky. I asked a woman who was leaving the church how to get to the next church. She started to tell me and then said, “Oh, don’t worry about it, I’ll drive you there.” I admit I was a little shocked by her offer, being a complete stranger, but that’s the way of the Irish. I actually got to the church early so, obviously, I made it to *this* Mass on time.

Some people may think I was being a little obsessive about getting to Mass on time since I was only a few minutes late. However, in looking at the celebration of the Mass, it should be clear that every element of the Mass is really important. It would be like trying to make a cake and leaving out the yeast: the cake would never rise. All the ingredients are important for the cake to come together. The same is true of the Mass. Every ingredient, or element, has its own importance, allowing us to encounter God in various ways. Those different experiences mix together to open us to the presence of Christ and allow us to participate in his perfect worship of God. It creates an opportunity for us to grow in our relationship with God in the way God desires. The totality of the Introductory Rites which begins the Mass, therefore, needs to be seen as an essential part of how we enter into the celebration of Mass.

What is the purpose of the Introductory Rites? They help us both to be formed into, and recognize, the community fashioned by the Holy Spirit that unites us as one in Christ. This begins right with the Opening Hymn and procession. We are called to stand together and join in song. This very action is a sign that we are united as one. In the ancient Church everyone would wait outside until the priest arrived. Then, joining in song, they would all process together into the church. It was a sign that everyone was moving to gather around the altar of God. At this time, not all of the assembly moves in procession, but all are still considered part of it. Those who process behind the cross represent the community gathered. As that community unites in song, they show their participation in the procession. In this action they express their union with Christ as a people joined with Him to worship God. When the song ends, all make the sign of the cross. This action is a reminder of our baptism when we were claimed for Christ by the sign of the cross placed on our forehead. Each time we make the sign of the cross, we are reminded of our baptism and how through our baptism God has invited us to this celebration. We are here because of that invitation from the Lord. Our participation in this procession is a sign of our obedience. We have gathered as his people in response to his call.

Opening ourselves to that invitation allows us to recognize the presence of Christ in the community. We acknowledge that presence as we greet each other, but we do not say hello or good morning; rather, it is again about our baptism. The priest then says “the Lord be with you” or something similar and the people respond, “and with your Spirit.” What we are really saying to each other is that the Christ in me greets the Christ in you. We all, through our baptism, are temples of the Holy Spirit and bearers of Christ. We acknowledge this presence of Christ in our community through this greeting. The greeting is an expression of our faith in the promises of Christ in and through our baptism. It is a sign that we seek to express Christ’s presence in and through our lives.

As we recognize that Christ is with us through the Penitential Act and Kyrie, we take time to do two things. First, we accept the reality of our brokenness and sinfulness by taking time to contemplate the week we have just lived. If we are honest with ourselves, we will acknowledge we have not lived our lives in Christ as fully as God desires. We will then implore the Lord’s mercy and seek his healing presence in our lives. By our willingness to assert our

sinfulness and seek the Lord's mercy, we proclaim our complete dependence upon God for what we are about to celebrate. We are not worthy to be called to the table of the Lord, but in this moment, we are reminded of God's unconditional love. We are reminded of Christ's very words, "I have not come to call the righteous, but sinners, to repentance." In our humility, we make clear that we can come before the Lord only because of what Christ has done through his death and resurrection. If God does not invite us and if God does not heal us, we cannot truly worship God. We are wholly and completely dependent upon God's unconditional love and unmerited mercy. We come before the Lord not in fear, but rather, through our humility, as people who have been gathered in hope, remembering that "rejoicing in the Lord is our strength." This moment gives us the strength to boldly glorify God the Father through Christ because of Jesus' saving actions on the cross and in the empty tomb.

We glorify God in our humility knowing we can only do so based on what God has done for us in the person of Jesus. As a statement of our faith, we cry out "Glory to God in the highest and on earth peace to people of good will. We praise you, we bless you, we adore you, we glorify you..." This hymn of praise of God is a simple appreciation of the basis of our relationship with God. It expresses our faith in God's mercy and that Christ intercedes for us in our need. It also is a symbol of our faith that Christ's action makes it possible for us to have a real relationship with God that leads to our salvation. Our proclamation of God's glory prepares us to unite our prayers as one and offer them up to the Lord.

When the priest says, "Let us pray" and then takes some time for silence, we are allowed time in the quiet of our hearts to implore the Lord with our needs. The priest will then collect the prayers, placing them before the Lord. In the final act of the Introductory Rites, the Collect is prayed in an attempt to unite the community and its prayer and provide focus to the celebration. Ultimately, the celebration of the liturgy is about the Paschal Mystery (Jesus' death, resurrection, and ascension), but this prayer helps the assembly to focus on certain aspects of that Mystery on particular feasts and the seasons of the year. It also brings together the prayer of the community and offers up that united prayer to God.

Throughout the Introductory Rites we have been having a conversation with the Lord, each other, and ourselves. It is only when we communicate that we can grow in relationship. This communication helps us to discover and reinforce what our relationship with God is based on. And, it is only through faith, humility, and obedience that we can really be prepared to enter into the Liturgy of the Word. By remembering and experiencing God's love and mercy, our hearts can truly be open to quieting down and attentively listening to God as He speaks to us through the Liturgy of the Word.

If you have any questions about anything, please do not hesitate to ask me directly, or send your questions to me at fr.brian@theholyrood.org. Please keep me in your prayers.

In Christ,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "Fr. Brian".

Fr. Brian