

## Explaining the Mass with Fr. Mark Bentz, STL

### Part 3: Introductory rites: Part 1

We now begin to look at the structure of the Mass and its parts. The Mass is made up of two principle parts, the Liturgy of the Word, and the Liturgy of the Eucharist. Today we'll talk about the introductory rites which prepare us for the Liturgy of the Word. Most people think that mass begins with the sign of the cross. Actually it begins with the entrance chant and procession into the Church. After the people have gathered, the procession of priest and ministers begins and the Entrance chant is recited or sung. If you go to daily mass, we recite the text of this 'entrance antiphon' during the procession. Most people don't realize this, but every mass has its own specific entrance chant that comes from the Scriptures and is set to music. The book that contains these chants is called the *Graduale Romanum* which is the official music book of the Roman Catholic Church—it actually has *all* of the music for every mass of the year in it! There is also a version of the book with simpler melodies for smaller parishes called the *Graduale Simplex*. Unfortunately, most people don't even know of these books' existence.

In the USA, there are 4 options given in the *General Instruction of the Roman Missal* for music in the beginning of mass which are as follows:

- “(1) the antiphon from the Missal or the antiphon with its Psalm from the *Graduale Romanum*, as set to music there or in another setting;
- (2) the antiphon and Psalm of the *Graduale Simplex* for the liturgical time;
- (3) a chant from another collection of Psalms and antiphons, approved by the Conference of Bishops or the Diocesan Bishop, including Psalms arranged in responsorial or metrical forms;
- (4) another liturgical chant that is suited to the sacred action, the day, or the time of year, similarly approved by the Conference of Bishops or the Diocesan Bishop.” (GIRM 48)

Most of us are used to an “entrance song” from JourneySong or another hymnal but, in fact, the singing of hymns at mass is actually the last option listed in the *General Instruction*, with first preference given to the chants in the *Graduale* as the official music of the Church. The benefit of this is obvious, as our own Archbishop has said, because then we are not trying to *plan* the liturgy by picking our own music, but rather *preparing* for Mass by entering into the particular celebration's inner logic. Indeed, the Church already has a plan for the mass that is unified from the beginning to the end with readings, prayers, and chants—even the tones used in the music of the *Graduale* fit together for a particular mass.

The procession itself reminds us of the entrance of Jesus into Jerusalem, since the priest acts in the person of Christ and the church sanctuary is a symbol of the new Temple in the heavenly Jerusalem. Dr. Brant Pitre, a prominent scripture scholar, also thinks it is reminiscent of Moses entering the 'tent of meeting' in the desert. We read in Exodus 33: 7-11, “...everyone who sought the Lord would go out to the tent of meeting. Whenever Moses went out to the tent, all the people rose up, and every man stood at his tent door, and looked after Moses, until he had gone into the tent...when all the people saw the pillar of cloud standing at the door of the tent, all the people would rise up and worship...Thus the Lord used to speak to Moses face to face, as a man speaks to his friend.”

When the ministers enter the sanctuary, they bow to the altar, which is a symbol of Christ as well as the place where the one sacrifice of Christ is offered to the Father. Furthermore, the priest(s) and deacon(s) kiss the altar; a kiss is both a sign of affection for Christ as well as the relics of the saints which are contained in the altar. In a dedicated/consecrated altar we usually find an *altar stone* which contains at least one 'first class' relic of a saint, which would be a body part—most typically a fragment of bone. This practice comes from the first centuries when Christians would celebrate mass on the tombs of the martyrs in the catacombs. If you visit the excavations of St. Peter's basilica in Rome, you will find that St. Peter's original grave had an altar built over it by at least the 2<sup>nd</sup> Century, if not shortly after his death.

After reverencing the altar, sometimes incense will be used on big feast days to incense the altar, the cross, and any icons present in the sanctuary. Finishing this, the ministers go to their chairs for the sign of the cross—where we will pick up next time!