

Lesson 4

The Sign of the Cross and the Greeting

Last week we talked about how the priest after entering the sanctuary kisses the altar. He does this because the altar is symbolic of Christ who is both the One who offers the Mass for our salvation and the sacred food of heaven. Next the priest goes to his chair.

Action

Once the priest has gotten to his chair he makes the Sign of the Cross. Recall that when we first entered the church we crossed ourselves, now the priest leads us in making the Sign of the Cross. We are no longer alone, but with others who believe the same as we do. The Sign of the Cross reminds us that Christ, our Lord and Savior, died for us on the cross. It's a sign of God's love and it reminds us that Jesus has overcome the power of evil and sin.

The priest then greets us. There are several greetings that the priest can say. The words in the greeting are a bit formal because they are taken directly from Scripture.

1. "The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ and the love of God and the communion of the Holy Spirit be with you all.
2. "Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ;" or
3. "The Lord be with you."

The greeting given by the priest should not, according to a directive by the Bishops, become too "casual and personalized." In other words, the priest shouldn't say "Hi" or "Happy to see you" or even "Good Morning" because the greetings are supposed to remind us that what we are about to do in the Mass isn't merely a human endeavor but one in which we become involved in Christ's divine mystery. We reply with "And with your spirit." This response is a reference to the fact that at his ordination the priest was anointed with the Holy Spirit who permanently changed him to act in Christ's person in his sacramental duties. When responding in a similar way to a deacon the response refers to the Holy Spirit he received at ordination as Christ the Servant.

History

The Sign of the Cross has been used from the earliest times as a gesture of blessing and as a reminder of Christ's victory over sin and death. It is used over the bread and wine as a blessing before the consecration. It is also used as a sign that certain other objects or people are to be dedicated to God--a blessing. The Sign of the Cross was introduced into the Mass during

the 4th century when the bishop or priest traced the cross on the forehead of candidates for baptism.

During the fourth century as the bishop entered the church he walked among the people on the way to his chair he greeted everyone in the name of Jesus, with the words, “Peace be with you,” or “The Lord be with you all.” Everyone responded with, “And with your spirit.” As mentioned the people saw their response to the bishop as an allusion to the Spirit he received through the laying on of hands at his ordination.

How can we better participate at Mass at this time.

All of us have been called by Christ to be his adopted sons and daughters. He is our head and we are his body on earth awaiting his return at the second coming. When we reverently make the Sign of the Cross we recall that Christ died for us and by his Cross have been renewed and brought into a new relationship with the Father. The priest’s greeting reminds us that we are God’s people gathered in response to God’s call. We are the Body of Christ whose head is Jesus who is represented by the priest.

“By the sign of the cross all magic ceases; all incantations are powerless; every idol is abandoned and deserted; all irrational voluptuousness is gusted; and each one looks up from earth to heaven.” *St. Athanasius in De Incarn. Verbi*, t.1

“Keep the door of your heart shut, and frequently defend your forehead with the sign (seal) of the cross, lest the exterminator of Egypt find some (unguarded) spot in you.” *St. Jerome in Ep. Cxxx. N.9*