

From the Pastor 060213 – the Mass – Introductory Rites

Dear Friends,

Earlier this year, I began the practice of devoting one bulletin column a month to liturgy. Over these past months I have focused on various topics, e.g. the Liturgical Year and the meaning of Lent. **Today I am beginning a series of columns (probably once a month) on the Mass, starting with the Introductory Rites and working our way through to the Concluding Rites.** I hope that this will help to enhance our appreciation of the Mass.

To begin, the Mass has a structure that has been in place for centuries. It consists of four parts: the Introductory Rites, the Liturgy of the Word, the Liturgy of the Eucharist, and the Concluding Rites. **Let's look at the Introductory Rites.**

We usually begin Mass with song. From the earliest centuries, singing has enlivened Christian worship. Indeed, singing is a form of prayer and it is valuable to understand it that way. Sometimes we can get so concerned about the tune or the notes or the sound of our voice that we miss the words. I find the words of most hymns so very beautiful. They are often poetic and really lift up our minds and touch our hearts – the essence of prayer! The hymns or songs sensitively express who God is and what our relationship with God is like. The opening hymn or Gathering Song is intended to unite all of us for the liturgy and it often introduces us to the special theme or celebration of the day.

At the eight weekend Masses here at Saint Margaret, we always begin with a Gathering Song. When Mass is not begun with song, as at our 6:30am weekday Masses, we can start with a read verse called the Entrance Antiphon. This consists of just one or two sentences, is often taken from one of the psalms or some other book of the Bible, and is provided in the Roman Missal. Its purpose is the same as a Gathering Song. Often the priest adapts this and includes it in his introductory remarks.

The Gathering Song accompanies the entrance procession. As you know, the procession includes the altar servers, the deacon, and the priest. One of the servers carries the processional crucifix, and the other two carry candles that are placed next to the altar. The crucifix focuses us from the very beginning of Mass on the crucified Christ who commissioned us to celebrate the Eucharist in his memory and whose risen life we receive in Communion. The candles speak of Christ who is our light both in the Word of God and in his sacramental body and blood.

In the entrance procession the deacon carries and holds high a large, decorated book. This is the *Book of the Gospels*. There is a centuries-long tradition of according this Book a special reverence and treating it distinctly from the *Lectiary*, which contains the readings from the Hebrew Scriptures (Old Testament) and the letters of the Christian Scriptures (New Testament). The lectors proclaim the Word of God from the *Lectiary*. The gospels, on the other hand, are the Good News of the birth, life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. They are the climax of the story and work of salvation. This is why the *Book of the Gospels* is given such prominence in the entrance procession. The gospel is proclaimed by the deacon or priest.

The deacon places the *Book of the Gospels* on the altar. Both this Book and the altar are symbols of Christ. Placing the Book on the altar where it remains until the reading of the gospel speaks of the unity of the Liturgy of the Word and the Liturgy of the Eucharist in Christ.

I will continue these comments on the Gathering Rites in my next column on the Mass. I hope these reflections are enriching for our faith.

Father Mike