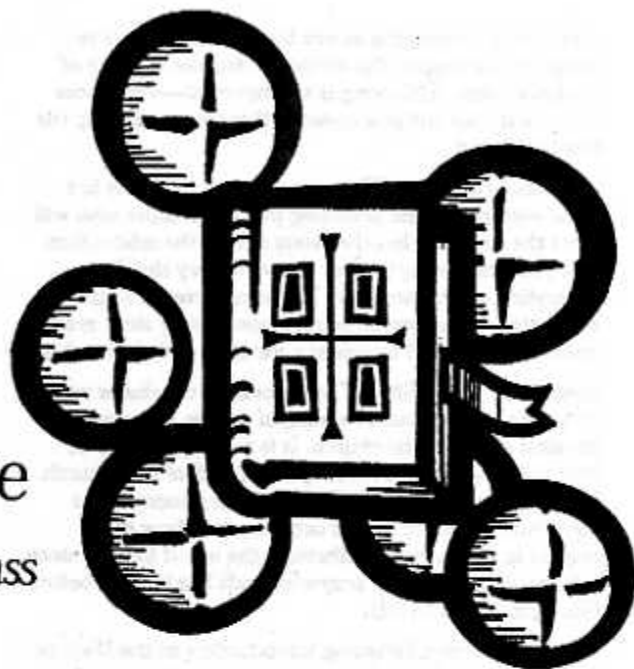


Give Thanks and Praise

A Popular Explanation of the Mass



Part 2

The Introductory Rites

No one comes to Thanksgiving dinner at the last minute and sits right down to eat...at least no one who is sensitive to the feelings of the hosts.

There is first the welcome at the door, hugs and kisses all around, the taking of coats and boots. There might be introductions, perhaps of a fiancée, a best friend from college, an aunt and uncle who haven't been seen by the family for many years. There are often new babies to hover over. And still before eating there is the telling of stories: the family history.

The celebration of Mass is similar for the Christian community. We never come in expecting just to sit down and immediately hear the scriptures. There are normal patterns, accepted things we do to get us in the proper mood, to help us begin, to prepare us for what follows.

Even before the first note is sung there is activity in progress. We are coming into the church. We are in the process of assembling. We are *gathering*. Perhaps we are greeted at the door by an "official" representative of the community. Many of us do it quite naturally on our own—beginning in the parking lot, in the doorways, in the aisles and pews. More and more we are becoming aware that before we can pray together, we have to *be together*.

We are also greeted by the decor, by the environment inside the church building. The hangings, the colors, plants and flowers, sacred art—all welcome us to the celebration and to the season at hand. Lilies, spring flowers, and water tell us that this is Easter before a word is spoken. The crib, evergreen trees, candles and gifts speak to us of Christmas. Environment and art are not expendable luxuries but necessary elements for our

prayer together. Christian public prayer addresses all our senses. It speaks to the whole person.

The Introductory Rites of the Mass continue this process of preparing us to become a true gathering of believers, an assembly united in heart and mind, a community within whose midst Christ is already present. The following are the various components of these rites.

- Entrance
- Entrance Procession
- Veneration of the Altar
- Sign of the Cross
- Greeting and Response
- Introduction to the Mass of the Day
- Penitential Rite
- Sunday Renewal of Baptism
- Kyrie [Lord, have mercy]
- Glory to God
- Opening Prayer

Although a time for common ritual preparation is very important, still these rites must be seen and celebrated as readying us for what is to come. Amid the many elements found here the Entrance Song and the Opening Prayer are often considered the most fundamental. The rites in between are more flexible.

Entrance Song: Singing, more than anything else, jells a gathering people into a unified body. Kiwanis and other service clubs know this well. They begin their meetings with song...something the members know and can sing with gusto.

We also begin our celebration with song, namely, the entrance or opening song. This is the first action that the

