

Three Minute Liturgical Catechesis

Article 6: Thanks and Praise at the Beginning

Well, we've been presenting these three-minute teachings for a few weeks now, so it must be time for a short quiz. Can you remember the meaning of the word "Eucharist"? If your memory is sharp, you may recall that it comes from a Greek word meaning thanksgiving. When we gather for Eucharist, we gather to give God thanks and praise.

Two of the components of the entrance rites at the beginning of Mass reflect those themes of thanksgiving and praise. Those two elements are the Penitential Rite and the Glory to God.

The Penitential Rite

It is easy to misunderstand the purpose of the Penitential Rite at Mass. Most people realize that it is not intended to be a replacement for the sacrament of penance. It is also not intended to be a time for us all to feel terrible about our sinfulness. That would not help us to enter into a spirit of celebration as we begin the Mass.

We do acknowledge our sinfulness, of course, but we do so in light of the wonder of God's forgiveness. It is God's mercy that enables us to stand in God's presence and share in the worship of Christ. None of us really deserve to be here, but the emphasis is less on our sins than it is on God's merciful love. We are here because God has forgiven our sins. We are here because of God's grace poured out in our lives. We do not deserve this gift, but we rejoice in God's goodness and love.

Thus the Penitential Rite serves to remind us of a basic reason we have to give thanks to God. The emphasis is on the reconciliation Christ has won for us rather than on our sins. Listen, for example, to the language of the missal for the invocations for the third form of the Penitential Rite:

You were sent to heal the contrite;
You came to call sinners;
You plead for us at the right hand of the Father;
You came to gather the nations into the peace of God's kingdom;
You come in word and sacrament to strengthen us in holiness,
You will come in glory with salvation for your people;
You came to reconcile us to one another and to the Father;
You heal the wounds of sin and division;

and on and on—always focusing on Christ and on God's forgiveness. This gives us good reason to give God thanks.

The Sprinkling Rite

Sometimes we replace the Penitential Rite with the Sprinkling Rite. This ritual action reminds us of our baptism, which freed us from the power of sin and made us God's adopted children. This rite, too, leads us to express our gratitude to God for forgiveness and for new life.

The Glory to God

After the Penitential Rite or the Sprinkling Rite, on most Sundays we take time to praise God with the ancient hymn known as the Gloria. This is a song of almost pure praise of God, with only two general requests for God to have mercy on us and hear our prayer. It reminds us of the wonder of God and the privilege it is for us to come into God's presence. Like the Penitential Rite, the Gloria leads us to give God thanks and praise.