

LOOKING THROUGH STAINED GLASS



A Column by Fr. Tom

The Mass, Part 7 - Hello, Welcome, Come in and Join Us

Some weeks ago, we introduced the Mass by comparing the Mass to a formal dinner party that one might attend. [cf. *Looking Through Stained Glass*, "The Mass, Part 1 - The Everlasting Banquet," Sept. 16, 2018] In that column, we suggested that, like a banquet, there are four basic parts to the Mass. Those parts are the "greeting," the "getting to know one another," the "meal proper," and the "farewell." Today, we will begin our examination of these four parts by exploring the greeting, or Introductory Rites.

At a banquet, the greeting includes welcoming people and inviting them in, and making them feel comfortable. In the Mass, the Introductory Rites have the same purpose. According to the *General Instructions of the Roman Missal (GIRM)*, "[The purpose of the Introductory Rites] is to ensure that the faithful, who come together as one, establish communion and dispose themselves properly to listen to the Word of God and to celebrate the Eucharist worthily." [GIRM, 46]

First, I would like to suggest that we have both formal and informal Introductory Rites. The "formal" rites are those that are designated by the Church and/or required for the Mass. The "informal" rites are those that are more customary and perhaps more specific to our parish. For example, within the last few years, we started a new ministry, the Welcome Ministry. People who are involved in this ministry greet people as they enter through the various doors to the Church. In fact, some of the Ushers, and even the clergy, have been getting involved in this ministry too. We also greet people through the parish announcements.

The formal Introductory Rites begin with the

Proclamation (or Opening) Song. According to the *GIRM*, "the purpose [of the Proclamation Song] is to open the celebration, foster the unity of those who have been gathered, introduce their thoughts to the mystery of the liturgical time or festivity, and accompany the procession of the Priest and ministers." [GIRM, 47]

Once assembled, we are greeted by our "host," Jesus Christ, who is represented by the priest celebrant. The celebrant begins with the Sign of the Cross and words of greeting, such as, "The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the communion of the Holy Spirit be with you all." Some of our priests will add another "informal" rite here and ask the congregation to greet one another, so that everyone feels more comfortable and welcome.

Following the greeting, the priest (and deacon) leads us in the Penitential Rite. We must remember that not only are we greeting one another, we are also greeting the Lord. We are preparing ourselves for being in the presence of the Lord. During the Penitential Rite, we seek God's mercy, His willingness to bring us into His house and allow us to join in the celebration, even though we are sinners and are not worthy of so great an honor. As a response to God's mercy and in recognition that God does indeed want us to be part of this celebration, we sing the "Gloria," the great song of thanks and praise to God.

Finally, the celebrant leads us in the Collect, or Opening Prayer, which helps us prepare for the core parts of the Mass - the Liturgies of the Word and the Eucharist.

Next week, we will continue our discussion of the parts of the Mass with the Liturgy of the Word.

