

September is typically Stewardship Month here at St. Mark the Evangelist, but our preaching will focus on the Mass itself, that we might live the Mass Monday through Saturday. Living the Mass daily is an act of faith and stewardship.

Full, Active, and Conscious Participation by the faithful in the liturgy needs to be cultivated. It includes singing at the proper times, listening at the proper times, responding at the proper times, kneeling at the proper times, and so forth. It is the engagement of the whole person. It also includes a "right disposition" and a spirit of prayer. That is to say: it is both physical AND mental AND spiritual AND emotional. As our Gospel today says: "For the Son of Man will come with his angels in his Father's glory, and then he will repay all according to his conduct."

Arriving on time is not just a question of obligation but of love and respect for Our Lord who calls us together to share his gifts, and who offers grace to us in each part of the Mass. Being on time is also a sign of respect for the community with whom we worship and who deserves our presence and the contribution of our prayers in each moment. The liturgy is essentially the worship of Christ's body, the Church ... it is the work of the people. We have an obligation to be on time for Mass. It is simple courtesy to be on time.

In the Introductory Rites of the Mass each of us are invited and challenged to accept that in this gathering it is not about us as individuals but as a community. It is God who calls us together as an assembly, and Christ who is truly present. The Mass is communal prayer, not private devotion.

The Introductory Rites tell us that we cannot hope to recognize Jesus' presence in the Host and Precious Blood if we don't first begin to recognize his presence in those gathered around us. The purpose of the Introductory Rites is not only to bring individuals to establish communion, but also to predispose ourselves to listen to God's word actively and to celebrate the Eucharist worthily.

The Introductory Rites consist of the opening procession and song, the greeting and blessing, the Penitential Rite and Kyrie, Gloria, Collect or Opening Prayer.

We do not gather in our own name; we gather in "the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit," around a common table.

The function of the Entrance Song is to open the celebration, foster the unity of those who have been gathered, introduce their thoughts to the mystery of the liturgical season or celebration, and accompany the procession of the priest and ministers. It needs to be long enough to achieve these purposes and not stop when the presider has reached his

place! Joining in the singing of the Entrance Song is our first act of participation in the Mass proper. How can we refuse to do so?

By making the sign of the cross after the entrance song, we renew the covenant that began with our baptism and proclaim that we gather for worship as participants, not spectators. The liturgical Greeting and the people's response signifies the presence of the Lord and manifests the mystery of the Church gathered together.

The Penitential Rite, which can take several forms, is a time of reflection on our sins and a prayer for God's mercy. It focuses on our sinfulness and helps us to confess our sorrow for any wrongdoing, knowing that God is always there for us, ready to forgive. We acknowledge our sins, and so prepare ourselves to celebrate the sacred mysteries.

On Sundays, solemnities, and feasts, the *Gloria* follows the Penitential Rite. The *Gloria* begins by echoing the proclamation of the angels at the birth of Christ: "Glory to God in the highest!" In this ancient hymn, the gathered assembly joins the heavenly choirs in offering praise and adoration to the Father and Jesus through the Holy Spirit.

Next the priest invites the people to pray. This prayer, customarily known as the Collect, concludes the introductory rite of the Mass. The priest first invites the people to pray. We remain silent for a moment to recall that we are in the presence of God and to call to mind our needs. In the prayer that follows, these private needs are lifted up to the Father through Christ and in the Holy Spirit.

The celebration of the Mass is an act of the whole assembly gathered for worship. In the Mass, the Church is joined to the action of Christ. We are joined to this divine action through Baptism, which incorporates us into the risen Christ. This action, which lies at "the center of the whole of Christian life", is initiated not by us but by God acting in and through the Church as the Body of the risen Christ. The Liturgy is designed to bring about in all those who make up the worshipping assembly a "participation of the faithful, namely in body and in mind, a participation fervent with faith, hope, and charity". To the extent that we are able to participate in this way, the work of redemption becomes personally effective for each of us. By such participation, we make the actions and prayers of the Liturgy our own; we enter more fully into our personal communion with Christ's redeeming act and perfect worship. As St. Paul says in our second reading we gather that we might "be transformed by the renewal of your mind, that you may discern what is the will of God, what is good and pleasing and perfect."