

# Introduction



Why do we gather on Sunday for Mass? What is the meaning of all those actions we do and prayers we recite Sunday after Sunday? At the most basic, they help us experience the presence of Jesus, our Lord and brother, sent by God to show us how to live life for God and one another. Our celebration of the Eucharist on Sunday—all the actions, gestures, postures and words—help us deepen our experience of Christ in our midst.

## Entering

You've been busy gathering everyone together, you've hopped into the car, and you're heading to church. Your mind may be a million miles away from God, from prayer. But the celebration of the Mass is already beginning.

When you arrive at church, you see neighbors,



friends, acquaintances. You nod recognition, exchange a couple of friendly words. This is the Body of Christ gathering!

*For just as the body is one and has many members, and all the members of the body, though many, are one body, so it is with Christ....Now you are the body of Christ and individually members of it.*

**1 CORINTHIANS 12:12, 27**

As you enter the church, you dip your hand into the **holy water font**, touch the water, and sign yourself with the blessed water, helping young children in the family to do the same.

*Do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? Therefore we have been buried with him by baptism into death, so that, just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, we too might walk in newness of life.*

**ROMANS 6:3-4**

As you walk into the church, you see people bowing or genuflecting before entering the pew or chair.

*...so that at the name of Jesus every knee  
should bend, in heaven and on earth  
and under the earth....*

**PHILIPPIANS 2:10**

When the tabernacle with the reserved Blessed Sacrament is in the body of the church, people usually genuflect as a sign of reverence to the real presence of Christ. When the Eucharist is reserved in a special chapel, or in a part of the church away from the altar area (sanctuary), it is more customary for people to bow: The bow is an even more ancient form of reverence than the genuflection and means the same thing. The altar itself is a symbol of Christ because it is where the most solemn and sacred event of the Mass takes place—the Eucharistic Prayer, during which the bread and wine become the Body and Blood of Christ.

Once in the pew or seat, you spend a minute or two settling in, getting the family members around you organized, and getting ready for the beginning of the celebration.



# Introductory Rites

ENTRANCE CHANT ♦ SIGN OF THE CROSS  
AND GREETING ♦ PENITENTIAL ACT ♦ RITE FOR  
THE BLESSING AND SPRINKLING OF WATER ♦ *KYRIE*  
GLORIA ♦ COLLECT

## Beginning

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Now the music begins! Everyone stands as a sign of reverence as the ministers and priest enter. The priest is a sign of the presence of Christ to the community. By his ordination, he is commissioned to continue the ministry of Christ as a leader of the Eucharistic community. He is the one who preaches, leads worship, offers service to all in need. He does this not exclusively, but as leader and model to the rest of the community.

The **Entrance Chant** serves a special function. It not only sets the theme and tone for the Mass—for



example, festive, solemn, penitential—but it is the first act we do together.

Singing the Entrance Chant says, “We have gathered here to do something as the Body of Christ, to celebrate the Christ in our midst and in each one of us.” The song concentrates our attention and serves as the first act of our worship together. During the song, the priest bows (or genuflects if the tabernacle is in the center of the altar area), and then kisses the altar as a sign of reverence to Christ. He may also use incense to honor the altar.

Led by the priest, we make the **Sign of the Cross** on ourselves. At our Baptism this was done for us



by our parents and sponsors. Now, by making that sign ourselves, we remember that we were baptized into Christ Jesus through that same sign. The priest **greet**s the people. He says, “The Lord be with you,” and we respond, “And with your spirit.” By doing this, we show that we see the Lord in one another.

The **Penitential Act** acknowledges that things don’t always go as they should. On many Sundays the priest now **bles**ses water and then **sprinkles the community** as a reminder of the Baptism we all have received, and as a way of calling us back to live the life of Christ according to our Baptism. On other Sundays we confess our sinfulness and the priest re-

assures us of God's love and forgiveness. The **Kyrie** (Lord, have mercy) is always a part of our expression of sorrow and assures us of Christ's mercy in our lives.

On most Sundays there is now a hymn of praise, the **Gloria** or "Glory to God," an ancient hymn based on the angels' words on the first Christmas.

*"Glory to God in the highest heaven, and on earth peace among those whom he favors!"*

**LUKE 2:14**

The priest says, "Let us pray," and then is silent for a time. No, he is not lost and looking for his place in the Roman Missal (his large prayer book)! He is spending a few moments in silent **prayer**, and he has invited us to do the same. We call to mind our needs, the needs of our family, and our special intentions. Then the priest says a general prayer to gather up all this silent prayer, and we say "Amen," which is Hebrew for "So be it!" This prayer is called the **Collect** because it collects all our prayers and offers them to God. In praying this prayer, we are conscious of Christ's presence because, as the priest reminds us at the end of the prayer, we pray through Christ to God the Father.