

## **The Gospel (Part I)** **Alleluia, Acclamation, Procession**

### **Alleluia and Gospel Acclamation**

*There follows the Alleluia or another chant laid down by the rubrics, as the liturgical time requires. Meanwhile, if incense is used, the Priest puts some into the thurible.*

After this, the Deacon who is to proclaim the Gospel, bowing profoundly before the Priest, asks for the blessing, saying in a low voice: *Your blessing, Father.* The Priest says in a low voice: *May the Lord be in your heart and on your lips, that you may proclaim his Gospel worthily and well, in the name of the Father, and of the Son, † and of the Holy Spirit.* The Deacon signs himself with *the Sign of the Cross* and replies: Amen.

If, however, a Deacon is not present, the Priest, bowing before the altar, says quietly: *Cleanse my heart and my lips, almighty God, that I may worthily proclaim your holy Gospel.*

The Deacon, or the Priest, then proceeds to the ambo, accompanied, if appropriate, by ministers *with incense and candles.* (Roman Missal, *The Order of Mass*, nos. 13-14)

### **Scripture**

#### **The Alleluia in Heaven**

Then I heard what seemed to be the voice of a great multitude, like the sound of many waters and like the sound of mighty thunderpeals, crying, "*Hallelujah!* [=Hebrew, "Praise the LORD!"] For the Lord our God the Almighty reigns. *Let us rejoice and exult and give him the glory, for the marriage of the Lamb has come, and his Bride has made herself ready...*" (Revelation 19:6-7)

#### **Jesus Preaches the "Gospel" in the Synagogue**

And he came to Nazareth, where he had been brought up; and he went to the synagogue, as was his custom, on the sabbath day. And he stood up to read; and there was given to him the book of the prophet Isaiah. He opened the book and found the place where it was written, "*The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to preach good news (Greek euangelizō) to the poor...*" And he closed the book, and gave it back to the attendant, and sat down; and the eyes of all in the synagogue were fixed on him. *And he began to say to them, "Today this scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing." And all spoke well of him, and wondered at the gracious words which proceeded out of his mouth...* (Luke 4:16-22)

### **Tradition**

#### **The Reading of the Gospel in Rome (2<sup>nd</sup> Century)**

St. Justin Martyr: And on that day that is called Sunday all who live in the cities or in rural areas gather together in one place, and *the memoirs of the apostles* and the writings

of the prophets *are read for as long as time allows*.<sup>1</sup>

### **Lighting Candles for the Gospel Reading (4<sup>th</sup> Century)**

St. Jerome: Throughout all the churches of the East when the gospel is read, candles are lighted even when the light of dawn reddens the sky; surely this is done not to dispel the darkness but as a sign of joy.<sup>2</sup>

### **Standing for the Gospel (late 4<sup>th</sup>-5<sup>th</sup> Century)**

Liber Pontificalis: Anastasius (399-401), born in Rome, [...] decreed that *as often as the holy Gospels are read*, priests are not to be seated *but are to stand and bow*.<sup>3</sup>

### **Singing the Alleluia at Different Seasons (5<sup>th</sup> Century)**

St. Augustine: *It is customary for us to sing [Alleluia] at a certain time in our solemnities, this being an ancient tradition of the Church*. It is not without deep meaning that we sing it on selected days. We indeed sing Alleluia on certain days, but we think it every day. Since the word means praise of God, even if it is not upon our physical mouth, it is certainly on the mouth of the heart...<sup>4</sup>

### **The Introduction of the *Alleluia* to Sunday Masses at Rome (6<sup>th</sup> Century)**

St. Gregory the Great: A person coming here from Sicily has told me that some friends of his, whether Greek or Latin speakers I know not, as if moved by zeal for the holy Roman Church, *were complaining about my arrangements, saying, "How does he manage to restrain the church of Constantinople, if he follows its customs in every way?"* When I asked him: "Which of its customs do we follow?" He replied: "*Because you have had 'alleluia' said at Mass, outside the season of Pentecost, and you have decided that subdeacons should approach the altar disrobed, and that the 'Kyrie eleison' should be said, and that the Lord's Prayer be said directly after the canon.*" I replied to him that we had followed no other church in any of these matters. *For, as for the fact that 'alleluia' should not be said here, this practice is said to have been derived from the church of Jerusalem, by the tradition of Saint Jerome, in the time of Pope Damasus of blessed memory*. And for that reason, in this matter we have limited more this custom that was

---

<sup>1</sup> Justin Martyr, *1 Apology* 67. In Johnson, *Worship in the Early Church*, 1:68. (1) In the writings of Justine, the expression "memoirs of the apostles," refers to the four Gospels. Compare Justin Martyr, *Dialogue with Trypho*, 103.8: "In the memoirs, which have been composed by the apostles [=Matthew and John] and those who followed them [=Mark and Luke]..." (Author's translation).

<sup>2</sup> Jerome, *Against Vigilantius* 7. In Johnson, *Worship in the Early Church*, 3:354.

<sup>3</sup> *Liber Pontificalis* 41.1. In Johnson, *Worship in the Early Church*, 4:57. Latin in Jungmann, *The Mass of the Roman Rite*, 1:448 n. 41.

<sup>4</sup> Augustine, *Exposition of the Psalms* 106.1. In Johnson, *Worship in the Early Church*, 3:30. Notice here that Augustine clearly identifies the singing of the Alleluia as something done by the congregation, not just by the priest.

handed down here from the Greeks...<sup>5</sup>

### **Papal Blessing of the Deacon Before the Gospel (7<sup>th</sup> Century)**

*Ordo Romanus* I: At the ending of the ‘Alleluia’ or the responsory, the deacons prepare to read the gospel. However, if a deacon is not present, a presbyter... prepares himself in the place where the gospel is to be read... Then the deacon kisses the pope’s feet and the pope says quietly to him, ‘*May the Lord be in your heart and on your lips*’. Then he comes before the altar, kisses the gospel book and takes it up in his hands. Two district subdeacons go in procession in front of him, they take the censer from the subdeacon in attendance and waft the incense smoke. They have two acolytes in front of them carrying the two candlesticks. When they reach the ambo, the acolytes step aside to allow the subdeacon and deacon to pass through... Then, slipping his finger into the page where is to begin reading, the deacon goes up to read. The two subdeacons return to stand in front of the steps to the ambo.<sup>6</sup>

### **Secret Blessing of the Deacon Before Reading the Gospel (11<sup>th</sup> Century)**

*Missa Illyrica*: May the Lord be in your heart and on your lips in order so that you may worthily announce the Gospel of peace.<sup>7</sup>

### **The Secret Prayer of the Deacon or Priest (16<sup>th</sup> Century)**

*Missal of St. Pius V*: “Cleanse and my heart and my lips, almighty God, that I may worthily proclaim your holy Gospel.” (Latin *Per evangelica dicta deleantur nostra delicta*). (*Missale Romanum* [1570], *Ordo Missae*, no. 1409)<sup>8</sup>

## **Mystagogy**

### **The Alleluia and the Song of the Angels (7<sup>th</sup> Century)**

*St. Isidore of Seville*: Lauds, that is, *the Alleluia*, has been sung since antiquity by the Hebrews. Its explanation consists in the translation of two words, that is, “God’s praise.” John reports its hidden meaning in the Apocalypse, the spirit revealing himself to him, that he had seen and “heard the voice” of a heavenly company of angels “like the sound of many waters and like the sound of mighty thunderpeals, crying out ‘Hallelujah’ [Rev

---

<sup>5</sup> Gregory the Great, *Letters* 9.26 (October 598 AD). In John R. C. Martyn, *The Letters of Gregory the Great* (3 vols.; Medieval Sources in Translation 40; Toronto, Ont.: Pontifical Institute of Mediaeval Studies, 2004), 2:561-563. (2) In defense of saying the Alleluia, Gregory appeals to both the custom of “the church of Jerusalem” and to “the tradition of Saint Jerome, in the time of Pope Damasus.”

<sup>6</sup> *Ordo Romanus* I, nos. 58-59, 62. In *Ordo Romanus Primus: Latin Text and Translation* (ed. Alan Griffiths; Joint Liturgical Studies 73; Chippenham: Antony Rowe, 2012), 42-43.

<sup>7</sup> *Missa Illyrica* 1, 4, IV (1030 A.D.). Cf. Jungman, *The Mass of the Roman Rite*, 1:454.

<sup>8</sup> Sodi and Triacca, eds., *Missale Romanum: Editio Princeps* [1570], p. 236; cf. *Missa Illyrica* 1.4.4. Cf. King, *The Liturgy of the Roman Church*, 260: The prayer... is not generally found in missals before 1570, though there are examples of something similar as early as the 12<sup>th</sup> century.”

19:6].” *From this no one should doubt that this mystery of praise, if celebrated with worthy faith and devotion, is joined to that of the angels. Alleluia, as also amen, is never translated from Hebrew into another language, not because they are less able to be translated, but, as the teachers say, antiquity is preserved in them because of their more sacred authority.*<sup>9</sup>

### Questions for Discussion and Reflection

1. What is the Hebrew meaning of the word “Alleluia”? Why is it appropriate for the congregation to sing this Hebrew word at this particular point in the Liturgy?

---

---

---

2. What do the Priest and Deacon say quietly before the Gospel procession? Why are these preparatory blessing and prayer so important?

---

---

---

3. What are the principal signs of reverence given to the Gospel Reading? What do they reveal about the significance of the Book of the Gospels?

---

---

---

### For Further Reading

Jungmann, Joseph, S.J. *The Mass of the Roman Rite: Its Origins and Development*. 2 Volumes. Translated by Francis A. Brunner, C.S.S.R. Reprint. Notre Dame, Ind.: Christian Classics, 2012.

Congregation for the Sacraments and Divine Worship, *The New Lectionary for the Readings at Mass, Ordo Lectionum Missae* (21 January, 1981).

---

<sup>9</sup> Isidore of Seville, *On the Ecclesiastical Offices*, 13.1-2.