

One of the senior priests once joked and said that you can tell a lot about a Catholic family by what time they arrive for Sunday Mass. There are the “**early birds**” who show up twenty minutes before Mass to get **their favorite pew**. There are the “**just in time**” families who arrive right **as the entrance hymn begins**. And then, of course, there are the “**late arrivals**,” the ones who always **slide in during the Gloria** and looking perfectly calm, as if that was their plan all along!”

We all may laugh, but it shows us something important: for many of us, Mass can become routine. We **come**, we **sit**, we **stand**, we **kneel**, but somewhere along the way, we stop asking, *why?* But **love always asks why**. Love wants to understand, to go deeper: *why do we do what we do?*

Dear sisters and brothers, that’s exactly what we are doing this month: **walking step by step through the Mass**. Not simply to gain information, but to let our hearts reawakened to the beauty, the meaning, and the power of what happens here at every Mass. Because for the more we understand, the more deeply we can enter in; the more deeply we enter, the more fully we can pray and unite ourselves with Christ in this beautiful celebration.

And so today, we begin with the very first movements of the liturgy — the

In this first part of the Mass we have: **i. The Entrance Hymn and the Veneration of the Altar** **ii. The Sign of the Cross and Greeting** **iii. The Penitential Act and the Kyrie** **iv. The Gloria**, and **v. The Collect**.

Each of these has a purpose. They gather us, prepare us, and lead us into the presence of God. Let us begin, then, with the first one: **The Entrance Hymn and the Veneration of the Altar**.

When the Entrance Hymn begins, it’s not just a signal that something is starting. It’s a **procession of pilgrimage** of the Church moving together toward Christ. And the very first sound that opens this movement is **the entrance Hymn**.

The Church says its purpose is *“to open the celebration, foster unity, introduce our thoughts to the mystery of the feast, and accompany the procession”* (GIRM 47). Think of Israel singing psalms as they climbed to the Temple: *“I rejoiced when they said to me, Let us go to the house of the Lord”* (Ps 122:1).

The entrance hymn is **our ascent into the heavenly Jerusalem**. But it only has meaning **if we take part**. Some of us **sing loudly, some softly, some maybe only in our hearts**. What matters is not the quality of our voice but the quality of our participation. When we sing, or at least pray the words with attention, we move from being scattered individuals into one body ready for this Holy Celebration. It is the first thing we do together as Church.

As the presider and ministers enter the sanctuary, they pause in reverence. Before the altar they bow deeply, for it is Christ who is our altar. But if the Blessed Sacrament is reserved in the tabernacle, they genuflect in silence, for here we kneel before Christ Himself, truly present in the Eucharist.

Then the priest kisses the altar, not a gesture of sentimentality, but of solemn love, because the altar is Christ Himself: **priest, victim, and altar** in one. And most altars contain **relics of the saints**, placed within them as a reminder that we never worship alone.

The altar is also **the place of sacrifice**. From Abraham and Jacob to Moses, whenever heaven touched earth, they built an altar. And here, at every Mass, heaven and earth meet again. That is **why we bow, why we kiss, why we begin** every celebration at the altar of Christ.

Dear sisters and Brothers, after the hymn ends and the altar has been revered, the Mass begins with the simplest and most familiar gesture: *“In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.”*

It is easy to rush through this, but do we realize what we are doing? We are tracing on our body **the very Cross by which we were saved**. This is our **baptismal signature**-the mark of belonging to Christ. From the day of our baptism, we were claimed for the Trinity. That is why we say, “in **the name**” not “**names.**” For God is One, yet Three Persons. The **Father** who created us, **the Son** who redeemed us, and **the Spirit** who guides us to heaven.

Christians have done this since the earliest centuries. One of the early Church Fathers, Tertullian, writing in the second century, said: “*At every step, at every coming in and going out, we trace upon the forehead the sign of the cross.*” It is **our shield, our reminder** that we **live and move** in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit.

Then comes the greeting. The priest says: “*The Lord be with you.*” Or, on some occasions, one of the fuller greetings given in the Missal: “*The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the communion of the Holy Spirit be with you all;*” or “*Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.*” These words are drawn straight from Scripture and echo greetings used by St. Paul himself.

This greeting is used **four times during the Mass**, and several times in the Bible. It immediately tells us: **what is happening here is not ordinary routine**. We are stepping into God’s presence, joining in a universal liturgy that unites heaven and earth.

And the people gathered respond: “*And with your spirit.*” It is word-for-word from the Latin: “*Et cum spiritu tuo.*” By these words, the people recognize the Spirit’s gift given to us, the priests at ordination, enabling us to stand in the place of Christ and lead the Church’s prayer. The priest prays for the Lord’s **presence upon the people**; the people pray for **the Spirit’s grace upon the priest**. In that brief exchange, the mystery of **the Church is revealed: God present in His people, God present in His minister, God uniting both** into one act of worship.

Dear sisters and brothers, after the Sign of the Cross and Greeting, the liturgy invites us to pause and accept the truth of who we are before God. Therefore, the presider then leads us into the **Penitential Act** (GIRM 51), where together we say: “*I confess to almighty God, and to you, my brothers and sisters...*”

Notice how personal that is. Not “**we confess**” in the abstract, not “**they.**” but ***I confess.*** Each one of us stands before God and the community, acknowledging our weakness and our need for mercy.

Now, this is not the Sacrament of Confession, but it is a moment of honesty to stand before God and one another and admit that we are broken, that we are sinners, that we are in need of healing. And in that humility, our hearts are prepared to enter the sacred mysteries.

And then comes the **Kyrie** — “*Lord, have mercy. Christ, have mercy. Lord, have mercy.*” Each of us standing before God and before one another in humility. And we cry out, not in despair, but in faith: “Lord, have mercy.” Just as Bartimaeus cried on the road to Jericho, “*Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me!*” (Luke 18:38). Let us understand that **Kyrie is not self-pity. It is confidence that the Healer is here, and that His mercy restores** what sin has broken.

Dear sisters and brothers, once we have confessed our sins and cried out “*Lord, have mercy,*” the Church places a **hymn of joy** upon our lips: **the Gloria**. Forgiven people can now sing. “**Glory to God in the highest...**” These are the very words sung by the angels at Bethlehem (Luke 2:14). And now, that song of the angels becomes our own, because every gift of mercy naturally **leads to praise.**

Dear sisters and brothers, the Gloria is packed with biblical phrases and titles of God. It is, in a sense, a summary of the whole Gospel. It is like a **three-act play**: **i. First**, we glorify the **Father**. **ii. Then**, we proclaim the saving work of the **Son**, His coming, His

cross, His resurrection, and His ascension **iii. Finally**, all is held together in the power of the **Holy Spirit**.

After singing praise to God, like the angels who sang at Bethlehem, the Introductory Rites conclude as the priest says: **‘Let us pray.’**

As the General Instruction of the Roman Missal (no. 54) explains, the priest invites the people to pray and, with them, observes a brief silence, a silence that helps us become aware of God’s presence and call to mind our intentions.

Then the priest proclaims the prayer known as the **‘Collect,’** a prayer in which the character of the celebration finds its voice. Fr. Charles Belmonte, in his reflections on the Mass, reminds us that it is called the **Collect** precisely because it **“collects,”** it **gathers up all the intentions of the faithful** and **unites them** into the offering of that day’s sacrifice.

And then comes your part: the faithful gathered respond with a simple word, **“Amen.”** But that **Amen is not punctuation**. It is our seal. A Hebrew word meaning **“So be it.”** With that Amen, we make the prayer our own. We are saying: **Yes, Lord, let it be done.** Yes, Lord, **this is my prayer too.**

The Collect is **the hinge**, the **moment** that closes the opening rites and prepares us to hear the Word of God.

Dear sisters and brothers, **from the opening hymn to the great Amen** of the Collect, the Introductory Rites are not just an introduction, but they are our sacred preparation. They gather us from many places, awaken our hearts, and unite us into one body, **ready to listen, ready to receive, ready to become what we celebrate.**

So, dear sisters and brothers, each time we come to Mass, let us come with our hearts wide open. Let every song we sing, every prayer we speak, every **Amen** we proclaim be our surrender to the God who calls us. Amen.