

The Introductory Rites

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I recently went to a friend's dinner party, aware that I would know few people there. When I arrived, I realized I knew only two people. My friend, the ever gracious host, introduced me to some other people, so that I wouldn't feel too uncomfortable and unsure of my surroundings. In much the same way, the Introductory Rites of the eucharistic liturgy introduces and acclimates us to the particular feast or liturgical season. These rites include the Entrance song and procession, the Sign of the Cross, a greeting, Penitential Act, the Kyrie, Gloria, and the Collect or Opening Prayer.

Obviously, the first clue to the feast or season is the art and environment of the worship space. If violet and small live plants decorate the space, mostly likely it is Lent. Fragrant lilies, a new flaming paschal candle, whites, golds, yellows in full force tells us it is probably the Easter season. Typically, the gathering song also gives us an indication of the feast or season. "Immaculate Mary" communicates that it is the solemnity of the Immaculate Conception, "Jesus Christ Is Risen Today," Easter Sunday, "To Jesus Christ Our Sovereign King," the solemnity of Christ the King, and "O Come, O Come Emmanuel" that Advent is upon us.

The Sign of the Cross is marked on our bodies to identify us as disciples who were baptized into the Triune God: "In the name of the Father, and the Son, and the Holy Spirit. Amen." Next, we acknowledge our dependence on our gracious and merciful God by asking our Lord to have mercy, or in the Greek: *Kyrie eleison*. During the season of Easter, there is the option of replacing the penitential Rite of Blessing and Sprinkling Holy Water on the assembly. In Baptism, Christ liberated us from sin and death in order to be reborn into his life of grace, mercy, and love. Our only response to God's kindness, compassion, and mercy is by offering "Glory to God in



the highest." This ancient hymn is based on the song from the Gospel according to Luke that the angels sang to the shepherds that Jesus was born. This was their song of praise to God who became flesh, became human in the person of Jesus the Christ. During Advent and Lent, the Gloria is not sung. It returns on Christmas Eve and again during the Paschal Triduum's Mass of the Lord's Supper on Holy Thursday evening.

The Collect or Opening Prayer is the conclusion of the Introductory Rites. The priest

invites personal prayer when he proclaims: "Let us pray." There is a brief period of silence for people to offer their personal prayers. Then the presider offers the prayer from *The Roman Missal*. The prayer unites—that is, collects—the personal prayers spoken within human hearts and minds to the prayer in the missal. This Collect is connected to the season or the feast, and thus indicates what aspect of Christ's mystery is being celebrated at this time and in this place.

Through my friend's hospitality at the dinner party, I was able to meet new people. A couple of them ended up becoming my friends as well. That dinner party left me changed, because I was acclimated to the situation, to the event. The Introductory Rites provide a "bridge" from whatever we were just doing before the liturgy into the liturgical event of feast or season. In other words, it allows us to transition to the liturgical event. Through environment, art, song, water, and prayers, we are gradually immersed into an aspect of Christ's great mystery being recalled and celebrated. In trust and faith, we leave the liturgical event changed and transformed by our Triune God.

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