



# *The Mass in Slow Motion*

## The Gathering Rite

*This is a series on the Mass explaining the meaning and history of what we do each Sunday. This series of flyers is an attempt to add insight and understanding to our celebration of the Sacred Liturgy. You are also invited to learn more by attending Sunday School classes for adults which take place in the school cafeteria each Sunday from 9:45 am. to 10:45 am.*

*This series will follow the Mass in order.*

**The Congregation Gathers** — We begin by noting the simple and obvious fact that before Mass can begin we must all gather. The fact that we come together, or gather, may hardly occur to us as remarkable. But rest assured, we cannot gather unless we are first called. Jesus says, “It was not you who chose me, it was I who chose you.” (John 15:16). It is God who awakens us each Sunday morning and invites us to the great Wedding Feast of the Lamb (cf Rev. 19:7-9) which is the Mass. Do you see your dignity? You have been called; an invitation has been made to you by God.

We would all be excited to receive an invitation from the President to a State dinner at the White House. But this invitation is even more astonishing, for it is made by God himself. And just as we could not go to the White House unless we were invited, we cannot gather for the Mass unless we are first called. And ancient Latin Hymn says, *Congregavit nos in unum Christi amor* (The Love of Christ has gathered us as one). Rejoice therefore in your call and dignity. We can gather only because we are first called and drawn here by the love that God has for us.



**The Procession and Entrance Song** — Then, something very remarkable happens at the beginning of every Mass. It is so normal to us that we hardly think of it. As the priest is ready in the back of Church to begin the Mass, the congregation suddenly comes to its feet and sings a hymn of praise as the priest walks down the aisle. What is this? Surely the people are not just welcoming “Father Pope” are they? No, indeed. The congregation is welcoming Jesus who has taught that when two or three gather in his name that he is there in the midst of them (Matt 18:20). The priest represents Jesus and acts in the person of Christ. Therefore, through the Sacrament of Holy Orders the priest is configured to Christ and is a sacramental sign of the presence of Jesus. Jesus Christ is walking our aisle and we welcome him with a hymn of praise!





It is quite fitting to recognize Christ who, robed in priestly vestments, arrives to minister to us in Word and Sacrament. So, don't just see "Father Pope" see, rather, Jesus and let him minister to you.

Here is a little historical background to the development of the Entrance procession and music associated with it:

- In the earliest days of the Church under persecution, and in the smaller buildings of the primitive Church, there could hardly have been much thought or possibility of formal processions. But by the 4<sup>th</sup> Century after the persecutions against the Church ended, larger ecclesiastical structures arose. The sacristies (the place of preparation for the Clergy), were usually located near the entrance of the buildings. This meant that the procession to the altar was now longer and, thus, took on added significance and importance.
- Such a procession could hardly be conducted in absolute silence. So, the addition of music was natural. But the organ, as we know it, had not been invented and instruments of any kind were generally not allowed due to their connection with pagan rituals. Music in the early Church was, thus, left entirely to the human voice and, singing alone gave color to this entrance procession.
- The texts for these songs were taken essentially from the psalms. The verses of the psalm that was selected would be sung antiphonally during the procession to the altar. It often happened that an introductory verse (or antiphon) would be sung by one or a few voices to introduce the psalm. Gradually the Antiphons came to overshadow the psalm itself. The Antiphons became more and more complex and were increasingly given over to be sung by an especially skilled choir called the "schola cantorum" with only the psalm verses being sung by the people.
- There developed a practice of shortening the psalm to correspond to the arrival of the members of the procession in the sanctuary. Once they were in place the song was brought to an end with the singing of the Gloria Patri (Glory Be to the Father ...).
- Over time there was a reducing of the entrance song to the following elements: An antiphon, drawn usually from scripture, only one verse of a psalm, a Glory Be and a repetition of the antiphon.
- Today there exists the option of:
  - Singing this Entrance Antiphon;
  - Singing a hymn appropriate to the liturgy or the season; or,
  - In the absence of music ministry, the Entrance Antiphon can be recited by the congregation.

**Summary:** We gather for Mass in response to an invitation made by God Himself. And when two or three are gathered in the Lord's Name, Jesus is therefore in our midst. The presence of the Priest reminds us of Christ's presence and also manifests it to us since Jesus ministers through the priest. Joyful in the Lord's presence we rise to sing a hymn, welcoming him.