



The
Mass
Explained

An Introduction to the New Roman Missal



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Introduction

SOON we will have a new *Roman Missal*, although it's not really new at all. While some of the prayers and rubrics have been fine-tuned and the book reflects a bit more maturity than its predecessors on such questions as inculturation and the role of the Priest, it describes the same Mass we have been celebrating since the Lord first commanded us to “do this in memory of me.”

Priests will find more accurate translations of the prayers to be a challenge, especially after having prayed from the *Sacramentary* for a half century, but even the newness of the words will soon pass. What, I pray, will not pass is the great excitement that drives the Church in her celebrations of this holy and living Sacrifice.

The People at Mass

God chose us, and God gathers us to the Cross of his Son at every Mass. Us! Of all the people in the world—the ones so much brighter than us, so much better looking than us, so much more powerful than we will ever be—he chose us “before the world began, . . . to be holy and blameless in his sight” (Eph 1:4). It was not we who chose him, but he who chose us. It is not “our Mass” which, like a town meeting or a political party we choose to form in our own image and likeness. It is his Mass, his Sacrifice to which he calls us to join our lives.

Chapter 3

Understanding the Introductory Rites

HOW we begin the Mass says a lot about who we are and why we are gathered.

Why do we go to church? Is it out of habit or a family tradition? Is it because I have finally figured out that I need church? Is it because I was “born a Catholic”?

We go to church not of our own initiative, but because we have been invited. Christ Jesus, who gave his life for me, invited me at the Last Supper when he said to his Apostles and to us: “Do this in memory of me.” So when I go to Mass it was never my idea in the first place. My participation in Sunday Mass is nothing more than a response from Jesus to his disciples to gather on “The day of the resurrection . . . the day of Christians . . . our day. . . .”¹

The Introductory Rites of the Mass, then, have two purposes: to form us into one people in Christ and to dispose our hearts to receive what God is about to give us in word and sacrament.

Christ gathers all the children of the Church to himself and to his perfect sacrifice of praise.

We know that Christ is present in this holy assembly, for he has assured us that where two or three are gathered in his name, there he is in the midst of them (cf. Mt 18:20). Christ is also present in the Priest presiding in his

FOR DISCUSSION

1. How does Mass begin?
2. Discuss the greeting of the people and the altar. How do these differ and how are they the same?
3. How do the Acts of Penitence center on the mercy of Christ? Why not just pray for the forgiveness of our sins?
4. Discuss the origins and current use of the Kyrie.
5. In the Collect, why do we pause after the Priest says “Let us pray”?
6. The “Amen” is the most popular response of the people during Mass. What does it mean and why is it used so often?



Chapter 9

The Deacon at Mass

The Deacon and the Liturgy

Like its predecessors, the newest edition of the *Roman Missal* echoes the Council Fathers who saw normative Eucharistic celebration as Mass celebrated in the local church by the Bishop “surrounded by his presbyterate, deacons, and lay ministers... in which the holy people of God take full and active part, for herein is the preeminent expression of the Church.”¹

From the Council Fathers to the latest edition of the *Roman Missal*, then, the Deacon assumes an indispensable, normative role in the celebration of the Eucharist. Two significant changes in the new *Roman Missal* reinforce this point.

Strikingly, the structure of the *General Instruction* has been altered to describe just two basic forms of Mass: Mass without a Deacon and Mass with a Deacon. Thus, while describing with greater precision the specific roles assumed by the Deacon, the new *Missal* emphasizes the all-pervasive effect that presence has to enhance and alter the shape of the celebration.

Secondly, in an entirely new section, we are told that “after the priest, the deacon, has first place among those who minister in the celebration of the Eucharist.”²

Two points should be made here. First, this concentration on the importance of the role of the Deacon is noth-