

This is the third in a series of articles on the parts of the Traditional Latin Mass. Today we pick up with the “Collect.” After the Prayers at the Foot of the Altar, much of the first half of the Traditional Latin Mass roughly corresponds to the New Mass. After the “Gloria” or “Glory to God in the Highest,” there follows the “Collect” in the New Mass this is commonly known as the “Opening Prayer.” This prayer tends to be focused on some aspect of the Mass of the day or the liturgical season. This prayer ends by invoking the Holy Trinity, for we pray to the Father, through the Son, in the Holy Ghost. The Priest bows toward the Altar Cross if the Holy Name of Our Lord is mentioned in the conclusion of this prayer, which happens a majority of the time. As the Priest offers this prayer, you should pray this prayer silently following in your book or on the folded handout. After the conclusion of the prayer all respond “Amen.”

There then follows the “Lesson”—a reading from one of the Epistles, or during certain times the Lesson might come from the Old Testament. The Epistle is sung in Latin and then again in English before the sermon. The question is sometimes asked: why sing the Epistle in Latin if it is only going to be read in English a few moments later? We can find the answer to that question in the Ordination Rite of a Subdeacon. A Subdeacon is one level of seven Holy Orders in the Traditional Rite of the Church which date back to the early Church. The Subdeacon in a Solemn High Mass has the sacred duty of chanting the Epistle. In a High Mass without a Subdeacon that sacred duty falls to the Priest. When a Subdeacon is ordained the Bishop hands him a book which contains the Lessons for Holy Mass. The Subdeacon is told to take the book and “receive the power to read [the Lessons] in the Holy Church of God for the living and the dead in the name of the Lord.” The Subdeacon was ordained, then, to read the Lessons during Mass, not just for the instruction of the people, but as a prayer offered to God for the spiritual good of the people, as well as for the Souls in Purgatory. The Lesson is chanted in

Latin, facing the east, as a way of offering God's Word back to Him in prayer. The entire Mass is a prayer offered to God, the readings are no different. The readings in the vernacular, the sermon, and the announcements were not traditionally considered a part of the Mass, because they were for the instruction of the faithful, and not offered to God. This is one of the reasons the Priest takes off his maniple when he goes to preach. But we are getting ahead of ourselves.

As the Priest chants the Epistle you are afforded time to prayerfully read and meditate upon the Scripture that is being chanted. Scripture is God's Inspired Word. The Holy Ghost speaks through Sacred Scripture. Take time to listen to His voice. After the Epistle is sung, the Priest prays the Gradual and Alleluia verse as it is being sung. Here is a time when you can prayerfully read the Gradual and Alleluia verse, then listen to the beautiful chant and allow it to move your heart.

The Priest then moves to the center of the Altar, puts incense in the thurible, and bows to ask God to cleanse his lips that he may worthily proclaim the Holy Gospel. There are two prayers that the Priest prays before singing the Holy Gospel. In the New Mass, the Priest prays the second of these two prayers, but the first was dropped. The first prayer makes reference to the Prophet Isaiah, who when told by the Lord to go and announce the Word of the Lord, cried out "Alas, O Lord, I am a man of unclean lips." An Angel of the Lord took a burning coal from the Altar of Incense and touched it to Isaiah's lips in order to purify them. The Priest prays that as the Lord purified Isaiah's lips with a coal, so may the Priest be purified that he may worthily announce the Holy Gospel.

As the Priest is praying these prayers the Missal and stand are moved from one side of the Altar to the other. The Missal begins on what is called the Epistle-side of the Altar, so called because it is the place where the Epistle is read. At that beginning position it faces liturgical

east. In the early days of the Church, church buildings were built facing east, for it is the direction of the rising sun and the rising sun was seen as a symbol of Christ, the Son of God, who rose from the dead. The early Christians faced east as a way of facing Christ together as they prayed. In modern times churches are no longer always built facing east, but even when the church doesn't face east psychically, the crucifix is said to represent east symbolically, and is therefore called liturgical east. The Gospel is moved to the opposite side of the Altar to represent how in the early Church the Gospel was taken from the south to the north. The early Christians took the Gospel from where they were in the south to where the pagans were in the north. When the Missal is placed on the Gospel-side of the Altar, the stand is placed on an angle so that the Priest faces liturgical north as he proclaims the Gospel. This represents the Gospel being proclaimed to the pagans.

The Gospel is incensed, as mentioned in the last article, to show the holiness of the Gospel. The Gospel is also kissed afterward as a sign of reverence. The Gospel contains the very words and deeds of our Savior. We therefore hold the Gospels in highest honor among the Scriptures and show it special signs of reverence.

As the Gospel is chanted you should prayerfully reflect upon the Gospel as it is found in your hand missal, or on the folded handout. If you reflect upon the Epistle and Gospel while they are chanted and then listen to them as they are read in English you end up hearing them twice. You should not look upon this as "useless repetition" but rather as an extra opportunity to hear God speak to you through His Holy Word. Sometimes we can get distracted the first time, but have better attention the second time we hear a reading.

After chanting the Holy Gospel, the Priest returns to the center of the Altar, removes his maniple and makes his way to the pulpit. In some older churches there is a high pulpit, which is

elevated by several steps. It is sometimes even located outside of the sanctuary. These high pulpits allowed people to better hear the vernacular readings and sermon in days before sound systems. The fact that these high pulpits are often outside the sanctuary was another sign that the sermon was not considered a part of the Mass that took place within the sanctuary.

The word “sermon” tends to be used in the Traditional Latin Mass, rather than “homily.” A “sermon” can be on any topic, whereas the word “homily” is used to refer to a reflection upon the readings just heard. In the New Mass there is a rubric, a rule, which states that the Priest ought to preach either on the readings, or some text from the Mass of the day. In the Traditional Latin Mass there is no such rubric—the Priest may preach on the readings, of course, but he is perfectly free to give a sermon, or a series of sermons, on any topic he thinks will most benefit the people. I pray that these reflections help us to enter more deeply into the Sacred Mysteries. More to follow in the next article. God bless you!