

This article continues our series explaining the parts of the Traditional Latin Mass. This article picks up with the Creed, commonly called the “Credo.” The prayers of the Traditional Latin Mass are often referred to by the first word, or first few words of the prayer. The word “Credo” means “I believe.”

The Credo is a prayer that summarizes the foundations of our Catholic Faith. As we sing along, or prayerfully follow along, we reaffirm all that we believe and recommit ourselves to it. This prayer is the same in the New Mass, but in the Traditional Latin Mass we kneel for the words “Et Incarnatus Est...” (“And the Word was made flesh...”). The Incarnation of the Son of God is one of the greatest Mysteries of our Faith. The Eternal Son of God humbled Himself and became flesh: Immanuel, God-with-us. The One Who is Consubstantial with the Father, took the form of a slave and became like us in all things except for sin, in order to die that we might have forgiveness of our sins and Everlasting Life. As we prayerfully meditate upon how He humbled Himself, we humble ourselves and kneel at this awesome Mystery. The custom to kneel for this part of the Credo is retained in the New Mass on Christmas.

As the Credo is being sung, the Priest recites it quietly and when he recites the words “Et Incarnatus Est” he genuflects. After he finishes, the Priest descends the steps and kneels along with the congregation as the “Et Incarnatus Est” is sung. The Priest and Altar Servers then go to the chair and are seated, and you are welcome to sit once the Priest is seated. I failed to mention it earlier in this series, but the Priest may also sit after he has recited the Gloria (Glory to God in the Highest) while it is being sung. As we all sit during the singing of the Credo and Gloria we are not meant to be idle—merely waiting for the singing to conclude. Sitting down allows us to assume a receptive posture in order to prayerfully reflect upon the words that we are singing or hearing.

It can sometimes happen that one may become distracted during the Credo. We must make an effort to prayerfully enter into all of the prayers of the Holy Mass. A practice that can be helpful, especially during the Credo, is to try to visualize each Mystery mentioned. As a brief example: when the words are sung in reference to the Holy Ghost proceeding from the Father and the Son, Who is together with them Adored and glorified one might try to imagine the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit in Glory; try to picture the Father and Son seated on Thrones together sending the Holy Spirit. As each line of the Credo is sung you might try to form an image in your mind representing each Mystery of Faith.

After the Priest is seated he puts on his biretta. The biretta is part of the traditional vesture for a Priest. He wears it when seated, much like a Bishop wears his miter whenever seated at Holy Mass. The biretta has three ridges or peaks. The number three is often used in the Sacred Liturgy to honor the Holy Trinity—Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. The Priest puts his biretta on and takes it off by grasping the second ridge, which represents the Second Person of the Holy Trinity: the Eternal Son, for it is through Him that we begin to grasp the Triune God.

There are a few times that the Priest removes his biretta while seated during Gloria or the Credo. Each time the Holy Name of Jesus is sung the Priest, as a sign of reverence, removes his biretta and bows his head. Whenever there is a reference to Adoration the Priest also uncovers and bows his head as a way of showing that Adoration. In the Gloria the Priest also uncovers and bows his head at the words "...receive our prayer" as a reminder that we all come before God as beggars in need of His grace. Whenever the Priest uncovers and bows his head you may bow your head as well to reverence the Holy Name or to bodily show our Adoration towards or dependence upon Almighty God.

Towards the end of the Credo the Priest returns to the Altar in time to sing “Dominus Vobiscum.” When the Priest stands, the congregation should stand as well. Following the “Dominus Vobiscum” there is an Offertory Antiphon that the Priest recites as it is sung. This begins the part of the Mass known as the Offertory. As the Priest removes the Chalice Veil a bell is rung. The removal of the Chalice Veil is a sign that the Holy Sacrifice is about to be Offered. As Our Lord was about to be Offered on the Cross He was stripped of His garments. The bell rung calls us to be attentive to the Sacrifice which is about to be offered.

The Priest then offers the bread and wine that are to be transformed into the very Body, Blood, Soul, and Divinity of Jesus Christ. The Offertory Prayers of the Traditional Latin Mass are beautiful prayers. While the Priest is praying them you should prayerfully follow along in the book. Through these sublime prayers the Priest offers the bread to God and begs mercy for himself, for all present, and for all faithful Christians living and dead. He prays that the Chalice might ascend before God as a sweet savor, and be for our Salvation and that of the whole world. During the Offertory Prayers you may also offer yourself to God. Each one of us is called to take up our cross and follow Christ. We do this throughout the day, of course, but at the offertory we can offer to God ourselves in union with Christ Who is being offered.

Next the Priest bows and humbly begs God for mercy. He then calls down the Holy Spirit upon the gifts to sanctify them. Incense is placed in the Thurible and the gifts are incensed with three Signs of the Cross. The Crucifix, Altar, and Priest are incensed as at the beginning of the Mass. The Altar Servers and congregation are incensed at this time reminding you that you are a holy people set apart to love and serve Almighty God—Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

During the incensation of the gifts and the Altar you might follow the prayers that the Priest prays quietly during that time. You might simply allow yourself to be moved by the

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beauty of the Sacred Rites. You might also meditate upon the fact that we are joining in the very worship of Heaven. There is a Heavenly Liturgy in which the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit are ceaselessly Adored. The Holy Sacrifice of the Mass enables us to participate in the worship which the Angels and Saints offer to Almighty God. In the Book of Revelation, Saint John had a vision of Heaven. He saw an Altar where incense was going up to God. The incense, Saint John informs us, represents the prayers of the Saints. The incense that we offer here reminds us of our participation in that Heavenly Liturgy. It also represents our prayers going up to Heaven. As you watch the incense go up, lift up your prayers to God.

I pray that these explanations of the parts of the Traditional Latin Mass help us to enter more deeply into the Sacred Mysteries. God bless you!