

There are many differences between the Traditional Latin Mass and the Novus Ordo Mass (the Mass that was implemented in 1970). For those who are new to attending the Traditional Latin Mass, these differences, at first, can be hard to follow and understand. This series of articles will review the various parts of the Traditional Latin Mass in order to help those new to the TLM come to a better understanding and a deeper participation in this ancient form of the Sacred Liturgy.

One thing that one notices right away at the Old Mass is that there is often more than one thing happening at the same time. The Traditional Latin Mass begins with the Priest and Altar Servers praying what are known as “Prayers at the Foot of the Altar.” At the same time that those prayers are being said, the Entrance Antiphon, known as the “Introit” is sung.

The Prayers at the Foot of the Altar are found in the red booklets. They are part of what is called the “Ordinary” of the Mass. The “Ordinary” is the part of the Mass that does not change from week to week. The “Introit” is one of the parts of the Mass that does change each week: these parts of the Mass are known as “Propers” for they are “proper” to each particular day of the calendar year. The Introit for the day can be found on the folded handouts.

Those who are accustomed to the New Mass are used to praying each prayer with the Priest at the same time that he does. In the Novus Ordo Mass each prayer is completed before the next part begins. One who is not familiar with the TLM can experience confusion while more than one thing is happening at the same time: they might wonder which part of the Mass they are supposed to be following? The Traditional Latin Mass gives the person in the pew the freedom to pray at their own pace. If you want to silently pray the Prayers at the Foot of the Altar while the Priest and Servers are doing so, you may prayerfully follow along in the book. Alternatively, one could prayerfully meditate upon the words of the Introit. One could even

benefit from simply watching what is happening at the Altar and allowing the beauty of the chant to lift your heart to God. Beauty is a path to God and allowing ourselves to be moved by the beauty of the Chant and the movements of the Mass are ways of uniting our hearts to God.

Whether you are praying silently the Prayers at the Foot of the Altar, meditating upon the Introit, or being moved by the beauty of the Chant and the Sacred Rites, you are actively participating in the Mass. The Mass is the highest form of prayer and the purpose of prayer is to lift the mind and heart to God. There are many things at the Traditional Latin Mass that lift the mind and heart to God. Focus on whichever one you find most helpful in the moment. If you find a line in one of the prayers or Propers that speaks to your heart, spend time with it, meditate upon it, offer it in prayer to God. One Doesn't need to worry about what the Priest is doing or keeping up with him. He is offering the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass on behalf of all present. This frees you to enter into the prayers at your own pace and allow them to lead you to God.

The Priest and Servers begin with the Prayers of the Foot of the Altar. After the Sign of the Cross, Psalm 42 is prayed with the Priest and the Servers responding to each other. The Psalms are often used in the Mass; they are prayers that are inspired by the Holy Spirit. When we use the Psalms to pray, we offer to God prayers that He Himself gave to us. Psalm 42 has us meditate upon the Altar of God. The Psalmist says that we go up to the Altar with joy, trusting in God's mercy. It is a great privilege for us to participate in the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass. The Mass is the unbloody re-presentation of the once-for-all Sacrifice that Jesus made of Himself to the Father on Calvary. It gives us joy because through His Death and Resurrection we were set free from sin and death. Participating in this great Mystery that Our Lord gives to us should indeed gladden our hearts, for by it we have the possibility of the forgiveness of our sins and the promise of everlasting life.

After Psalm 42 is completed, the Priest bows low and confesses that he is a sinner in need of God's mercy. The profound bow made during this prayer reminds us of the tax collector Our Lord spoke of who bowed low, beat his breast, and begged God for mercy acknowledging his own unworthiness.

We notice that this prayer is one of several options in the New Mass, but in the New Mass it is found in a shortened version. The traditional prayer calls not only upon the Blessed Mother, as the new version does, but also upon Saint Michael, Saint John the Baptist, and Saints Peter and Paul. Scripture tells us that we are surrounded by a cloud of witnesses and the Traditional Latin Mass often calls upon various Saints to come to our aid and intercede for us. Once the Priest has completed this prayer, the Servers pray that God have mercy upon the Priest and then the Servers confess their own sinfulness praying the same prayer that the Priest has just prayed. When the Servers complete their prayer the Priest prays that God will be merciful to them and then prays a minor absolution asking God to take away all our sins. This minor absolution is not the same as the Absolution that we receive in the Sacrament of Penance, but the minor absolution does take away our venial sins. (Mortal sins must be absolved in the Sacrament of Reconciliation.)

There is another brief exchange between the Priest and Servers and then the Priest prays two prayers quietly as he ascends the steps of the Altar. The Priest then goes to the Missal and prays quietly the Introit which has just been sung.

I pray that these articles will help you grow in your appreciation of the Traditional Latin Mass and participate at it more fruitfully. May Almighty God draw all of us ever more deeply into these Sacred Mysteries!