

THE NEW ROMAN MISSAL - THE INTRODUCTORY RITES

Most Catholics know (I hope) that the Mass is divided into two basic parts: the *Liturgy of the Word* and the *Liturgy of the Eucharist*. But not everyone might realize that those two parts are subdivided into sections called “rites.” We might see the whole first part of the Mass as the *Liturgy of the Word*, but that really doesn’t begin until the first reading is proclaimed. Prior to that, from the Gathering (or “entrance”) Song to the Opening Prayer (or *Collect*) we are in the subdivision of the Mass called the *Introductory Rites*.

The purpose of those introductory rites is just what the title implies: to get us ready for what’s to come in Word and Eucharist and to help us move from the everyday world into the world of worship—*sacred space & sacred time*. Everything in this section, with the exception of the Sign of the Cross, changed to a greater or lesser extent five years ago. Except for *The Lord be with you*, the other greetings were changed significantly. You might remember the *fellowship* of the Holy Spirit which became the *communion* of the Holy Spirit—a wonderful change from an exclusive masculine noun (*fellowship*) to the more inclusive and liturgically rich word *communion*. And my favorite new greeting comes straight from the letters of St. Paul: *Grace to you and peace, from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ*—though some still seem to have a hard time replying to that since it doesn’t end with the word “you.” The use of previous greetings from the old *Sacramentary* are no longer permitted.

But probably the biggest change both in these Introductory Rites and throughout the Mass came with a literal translation from the Latin of your response: *And with your spirit*. I can always tell when people haven’t been to Mass in a while—at this point, a **long** while—when they respond *And also with your spirit*, a hybrid of the old and new. That change reflected the Latin text of both pre and post-Vatican II, *et cum spiritu tuo*, which every other language group in the world translated accurately after the Council—with the exception of the English-speaking Church. And there’s a good and important reason for this translation; it’s not just about being faithful to a dead language.

When the presider and assembly exchange that greeting throughout the Mass, it isn’t the same as saying “how are you?” and “fine, how are you?” The language of liturgy is **ritual** language: there is a deeper, theological, and often scriptural meaning behind everything we say and pray at Mass. Priests who think it’s OK to be folksy and add their own “good mornings” or other greetings or who say “the Lord *is* with you” just don’t get it. *The Lord be with you* can’t be changed to a statement of fact, but must remain what it is meant to be: a wish, a hope, an expression of blessing, respect and empowerment. And the reply of the assembly is addressed to the priest-presider **not** as an individual, but in his office as animator of the assembly which he exercises by virtue of the *Spirit* conferred in the Sacrament of Holy Orders. We’re most definitely not just saying “hi” to each other!

Following the Sign of the Cross and the Greeting, we begin what used to be called the *Penitential Rite*. However, since one “rite” in the middle of another “rite” really doesn’t make much sense, this part of the *Introductory Rites* became the *Penitential Act*. There have always been three forms for this part of the Mass and those have remained pretty much the same, aside from the wording of the *Confiteor* which restored what I consider to be the excessively demeaning triple *through my fault...my most grievous fault* breast-beating language. Fortunately, it’s the Presider’s option as to which form to use!

The most extensive changes in the *Introductory Rites* came in the *Glory to God* and probably impacted musicians more than any other members of the assembly. Perhaps the most notable change came in the opening line where *peace to his people on earth* became *and on earth, peace to people of good will*. This is one of the many instances in the New Roman Missal where a wonderful effort was made to mirror the language of biblical texts where the New American Bible (the version we use in the Liturgy of the Word) puts those words on the lips of the angels in Luke’s Gospel as they announce the birth of Jesus to the shepherds. Other changes in the *Glory to God* reflect, not only an accurate translation from the Vatican II Latin original text, but an effort to be more theologically precise—something that might seem insignificant to many today, but was critically important in the early Church when so many truths of the faith were being debated. For example, *only Son of the Father* became *only begotten Son...Son of the Father*, emphasizing **both** the unique humanity (*only begotten*) and the divinity of Jesus (*Son of the Father*). The opening section also restores a litany of praise that became lost in the previous translation. Instead of *we worship you, we give you thanks, we praise you for your glory*, we now say *we praise you, we bless you, we glorify you, we give you thanks for your great glory*—a small change, perhaps, but certainly more poetic.

The final element of the *Introductory Rites* is the Opening Prayer which has had its ancient name restored: *Collect*. That name expresses what this first “presidential prayer” of the Mass is meant to do: “collect” the needs of the universal Church at this moment in the liturgical year or on this feast day as this local Church begins our time of worship together. In the old *Sacramentary*, the presider had two choices for this prayer, but only one remains in the New Roman Missal.

Now, with Lent beginning on March 1, I’ll take a break from these articles in order to focus on this transformational season of the Church Year which leads us into the great celebration of our redemption through the dying and rising of Jesus. But I do want to thank those who have expressed their gratitude for these articles, either in person or through some very kind and thoughtful anonymous phone messages!

Fr. Bob