

The Introductory Rites:

Part III in the Parish Liturgy Series



The Sign of the Cross

Once the priest has reached the altar and the gathering hymn is completed, he invites the assembly to sign themselves with the cross of our salvation: "In the name of the Father, and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit." This simple yet powerful gesture is an outward sign of who we are as the gathered assembly on the Lord's Day. We are a people marked by the cross of Jesus. We are not only believers in the Holy Trinity but a community that lives in communion with Father, Son and Holy Spirit. The mark of the cross reveals that we belong to Christ.

The use of gestures in the liturgy reminds us that we worship with our whole being, not just our minds. The movement of our bodies becomes a non verbal prayer; our whole being gives praise to God. The *Catechism* confirms the importance of signs, symbols and gestures:

"In human life, signs and symbols occupy an important place. As being at once body and spirit, man expresses and perceives realities through physical signs and symbols. As a social being, man needs signs and symbols to communicate with others, through language, gestures, and actions. The same holds true for his relationship with God." (CCC #1146)

The Greeting

After signing ourselves with the cross the priest greets the assembly in words that have strong biblical roots. When we hear: "The Lord be with you," we hear a greeting that is more than just "Hello" or "Good Morning." The ritual greeting in the liturgy distinguishes us as the body of Christ, the Church, now gathered as one in the name of the Lord. Our response is one of the first changes we will notice in the revised translation of the Mass. Instead of saying, "And also with you," we will respond: "And with your spirit." The new translation is a more accurate rendering of the Latin, "*Et cum spiritu tuo.*" This corresponds more closely to the way other language groups have translated this same greeting. "And with your spirit" speaks to the deeper dimension of who we are as baptized members of Christ's body. We are a people filled with the spirit of Christ. When we say that somebody has "a great spirit", we mean that there's something deep inside of them that is the true mark of their personality and being. "And with your spirit," tries to capture that something more.

Penitential Act

We recognize that we are sinners, unworthy to share so intimately in the sacrifice of Christ. But we also know ourselves as the redeemed people of God. In God's mercy we are reconciled to the Father and invited to sit at his Table.

The Roman Missal provides three options for the Penitential Act. This penitential rite does not include sacramental absolution as in the Sacrament of Reconciliation, but it does allow us to bring our minor faults before God to seek forgiveness and to acknowledge the mercy of God that comes to us through the saving death and resurrection of Jesus.

In Form A of the Penitential Act the congregation prays the traditional *Confiteor*. We recognize this prayer from its first words: "I confess to almighty God". In the new translation we will return to an earlier rendition of the prayer that highlights our faults by a triple admission of sin: "through my fault, through my fault, through my most grievous fault".

In Form B the priest says: "Have mercy on us, O Lord." The congregation responds: "For we have sinned against you." The priest continues: "Show us, O Lord, your mercy." The congregation responds: "And grant us your salvation."

Form C of the Penitential Act will remain the same in the new translation as the congregation responds "Lord, have mercy" and "Christ, have mercy" to a series of invocations. Sometimes we use the Greek translation: "Kyrie, eleison, Christe, eleison."

On some Sundays, especially during Easter, the Rite of Blessing and Sprinkling with Holy Water may replace the Penitential Act. This rite is a reminder and a renewal of our Baptism which in turn leads us to celebrate at the Lord's Table.

Getting Ready for the Revised Missal

- What are the occasions outside of Mass when you may make the sign of the cross? What is your intention as you sign yourself?
- Look up the following references in your bible to find the roots of our greetings at Mass: *Galatians 6:18; Philippians 4:23; 2 Timothy 4:22; Philemon 25*).
- How might you prepare for Mass by thinking about the Penitential Act that is at the beginning of Mass?