

THE MASS

Lesson Two: Called Out Of The World

Begin as You Mean to Continue:

Charles Haddon Spurgeon was a 19th century preacher in the Particular Baptist Church, who famously said, “Begin as you mean to go, then go on as you began, and let The Lord be all in all to you.” Spurgeon was certainly not thinking of the liturgy of the Catholic Church at the time, but “begin as you mean to continue” is nevertheless good advice for us. If we want to get the most out of Sunday Mass through our participation, it is vitally important that we consciously *make that our intention*, and then take the responsibility for being mentally and spiritually prepared for the liturgy, even before we find a parking space or a pew.

Timothy O’Malley, director of the Notre Dame Center for Liturgy writes: “Our very first act of worship at Mass occurs before we enter the assembly, as we reorient our entire day to participate in the Eucharistic sacrifice. In this way, we have already offered ourselves to God.” If we can get to Church five or ten minutes early, we can invest some time mentally quieting down with a rosary, or reviewing the Mass readings, or just taking a few deep breaths. We might say a prayer for the celebrant or ministers. When we get our new worship space, we could light a candle for a special intention.

The fact is, if we come to church expecting something from The Lord we will prepare ourselves for an hour unlike any other of our week. We will “begin as we mean to continue”, or as Bishop Barron reminds us “The Mass begins before it begins, in the way we gather. The very way in which we gather for Mass is conveying something quite powerful.”

Called Out of the World:

The Greek word *ekklesia* is where we get the root of our English word “church”. This word literally means “called out”, which is a perfect description of what happens at every Mass, as we gather together. We are truly called out of the world, of our daily lives, of our many tasks and obligations, for the purpose of joining with others in

celebrating the living Christ, and our true reason for existing – to glorify God. The Church has been called out of what is sometimes ugly or sinful, and into a new realm or kingdom – a world of good order – where love and forgiveness reign. This is what God has always desired for us – a space of new creation. The Church Fathers saw this as a continuation of what God had provided for mankind since the beginning...The garden of Eden, the ark of Noah, the tabernacle, the temple, the ark of the covenant, all culminating in the upper room. Orthodox Jews, even today understand the celebration of Passover as a gathering together with their ancestors at the foot of Mount Horeb to worship. In like manner, Catholics see Mass as a gathering together with all saints and angels in the upper room; and ultimately before the very throne of God.

We Stand Together :

Even though we may have little in common with the person in the next pew, we become equals within the assembly of the Mass. Our shared weaknesses are actually a great strength, a great leveler within the church, because in recognizing our frailties we become better able to tolerate the failings of others, as we work together toward the same end. We are also reminded of our total dependence upon God.

The Cloud and Glory of Unknowing

In these opening moments we, as a body, are immediately thrust forward into the heavenward presence of saints and angels. Ministers come forth bearing flame, incense, and the Word of God. It's a scene right out of Rev 8:3-4:

Another Angel came and stood at the altar, holding a gold censer. He was given a great quantity of incense to offer, along with the prayers of all the holy ones, upon the altar that was before the throne. The smoke of the incense, along with the prayers of the holy ones went up before God.

This is the "Play of Adoration", as Bishop Barron calls it. We feel it...we sense it...we experience it. There is a cloud of incense, music, procession, and a cloud of mystery at this moment. Normally we don't like "fuzziness" in our lives, but at this moment, we allow ourselves to be carried into the unknowingness of God and His holy Church, as

we begin this perfect sacrifice described by the prophet Malachi: *In every place and time, incense and pure offering will be brought to My Name, because My Name will be great among the nations, says The Lord Almighty*

Penance, Praise and Supplication :

1.) Penance:

Multiple times a day, before they engage in prayer, Muslims will perform a ritual ablution or washing. Jewish ablutions can be anything from a simple hand washing to a full immersion. Within the Catholic Mass there are several ablutions that occur throughout the liturgy, each taking a different form. It begins with the sign of the cross after dipping our finger in holy water. If it's a "high" Mass, it continues with the casting forth of incense during the opening procession. During the Easter season there is the sprinkling of holy water upon the congregation, and incensing of the altar and people at times.

But at every Mass there is a ceremonial ablution which occurs verbally: "Lord have mercy, Christ have mercy, Lord have mercy." The Greek word for mercy..."elaison" has the root word of "oil", and connotes not so much God's forgiveness, as His steadfast, eternal love. We are asking God to soothe us with His love, and take away the pain in our life which we have suffered in the world.

2.) Praise:

Having been washed clean, it is only natural that we now break into praise for what God has done. "Glory to God in the highest" is our shout! This is the great song of the Church, in praise of no one else but God Himself.

3.) Supplication:

Often called the "Collect" this is a specific prayer in which we recognize God for a particular act that He has done – some great thing performed in our midst – and ask Him to continue to do great things for us.

"Mysteries in religion are measured by the proud according to their own capacity; by the humble, according to the power of God. The humble glorify God for them, the proud exalt themselves against them." Bl. John Henry Newman