

Mass Parts 3/52:

Entrance Procession

We are ready now for Mass to start. The welcome is given, the announcements made, and the opening song announced. We stand and rejoice, preparing every part of ourselves to participate in this holy event.

It begins with a procession, yet this is so much more than walking up from the back. Think of a pilgrimage, a journey to a whole new holy place. Our processions are the last few steps of pilgrimage. From all walks of life, from different homes, from various mindsets and worries, we come together into the church. From the doors that separate our sacred space from the outside world, we come into this holy ground. We are coming to a new place, a new frame of mind.

The representative ministers serving at this particular Mass make up the members of the procession. They represent the parish and all present. As they walk by, send your hearts and your prayers with them towards the altar.

In some processions, you will see a server with incense. The thing they are swinging is called a *thurible*. While carrying it, they are called a *thurifer*. There is a hot coal with incense slowly burning on it. The smoke that wafts out should be sweet smelling, reminding us of our prayers rising up to God (Ps 141:2). We normally carry up a cross: the source of our salvation. As it has the body of Christ imaged on it, it is called a *crucifix*, and the server carrying it is called a *crucifer*. With it, we also carry up candles, reminding us that Jesus is the light of the world. With Latin for light being *lux*, unfortunately the server carrying it is technically called a *lucifer*. which is indeed the meaning of Satan's name: "bearer of light."

During this procession, we are singing. We have an impressive parish here where most of the people sing. Not all parishes do that! We all sing as one people, blending our voices in praise of God. St. Augustine tells us that "to sing is to pray twice." He also says that "singing is the language of the angels." Again, this music is not just travelling accompaniment for the procession. The Opening Hymn is about preparing our hearts and minds for worship as well. The air and vibrations in our bodies while singing affect us in psychosomatic ways, awakening our bodies, and our minds and our hearts. I heard of a church where, when they started the Mass, the people were too lazy in their opening responses, so the priest had the choir do another opening song. Apparently the first one didn't work! It's not about singing well, it's about singing from your heart. If you weren't blest with a very good voice and can't sing, you should sing even louder and throw it back at God.

The procession ends when the ministers enter the sanctuary and go to their assigned places. On the way to the presidential chair, the priest goes first to the altar and kisses it. I have had little kids ask me why I push my nose on the altar, or why I smack my forehead there. I am actually kissing it. This shows reverence and love for the place of sacrifice, the spot where the Body of Christ will soon be made present. The altar is the representation of Christ at this point, for in the Letter to the Hebrews (9:11-14), Christ is the victim being sacrificed, the priest offering the sacrifice, and, in His Body, the very place of sacrifice.

Next week: The Sign of the Cross

- Father Scott Kopp

