



# *Pastor's Column*

*St. Peter Catholic Church*

*December 2, 2018, First Sunday of Advent*

## *The Mass – Explained*

Through the Advent and Christmas seasons, the Pastor's Column will focus on the parts of the Mass, thus to explain in some detail what we do at Mass and why. We begin with the start of Mass: the Procession.

Many churches have bells in a tower or some other structure. The bells signal the start of Mass calls us to gather and worship; they are, as it were, the loudest evangelizers in the church. The blessing ritual of new bells installed in churches is often referred to as their "baptism" because the bells ring and call us to worship and thus, in that sense, proclaim the Gospel to every creature, which is precisely the mission given to all of us at Baptism.

The congregation stands to acknowledge that something important is about to begin, that an important person is about to make an appearance. In this instance, that important person is Jesus Christ, Who presents Himself to us in the Mass in both Word and Sacrament.

The Entrance Antiphon (or Processional Hymn): derived from Scripture or from some other holy text that invites us to worship and to some extent provides a sort of preamble to the Mass that is about to be celebrated. In our modern times, the Processional Hymn often takes the place of the Entrance Antiphon at the Sunday Mass, but the fundamental purpose is the same: to set the tone, as it were, for the Mass of that day.

The order of procession. If incense is used, the *thurifer* carrying the thurible leads the procession, and the incense represents the prayers of all of us, the faithful, who have gathered together in worship. The *crucifer* carries the processional cross, which is an image reminding us that Jesus is our "leader to salvation...made perfect through suffering." The candle-bearers carry the candles that are placed on the altar with the Book of the Gospels and then used later in the Gospel procession to remind us that Christ our Light is the Light of the Gospel, and we ourselves are called by Christ to be the light of the world. A deacon (or a lector in absence of a deacon) carries the Book of the Gospels, which contain the words of Jesus Himself and thus marks the high point of the Liturgy of the Word. Other ministers process in as needed (additional lectors if any, extraordinary ministers of Holy Communion if any, a second deacon if present, concelebrating priests if present). The final member of the procession is the main celebrant, the presiding priest of that Mass, who in the Mass and, indeed, in every celebration of every Sacrament, serves the Church and the people of God as *alter Christus* ("another Christ") and is present in the celebration *in persona Christi* ("in the person of Christ").

The genuflection (or profound bow). The genuflection is a very ancient gesture. Servants and other subjects of royalty would approach the king or queen and genuflect on the left knee to show their subservience to their royal masters. In Christianity, we genuflect on the right knee to Christ in the tabernacle – that is, the Real Presence of the Lord in the Eucharist – to show that Christ is more highly to be revered even than the most powerful masters of our temporal world, that Christ is King of kings and Lord of lords. In absence of a tabernacle, the profound bow is directed toward the altar, the site of the Sacrifice.

The placement of the various processional articles. The cross is stationed near the altar as a constant reminder to us throughout Mass that it is the Suffering Servant, Christ on the Cross, Who makes possible the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass, Who in fact *is* the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass. The candles are placed on the altar, along with the Book of the Gospels, to emphasize the profound connection between Ambo (where the Word is proclaimed) and Altar (where the Sacrifice is commemorated) – thus calling attention to the spiritual link between Word and Sacrament.

Reverencing the altar. The altar is a symbol of the Cross – the Cross being the supreme altar upon which the Lamb of God was offered in sacrifice for the new and eternal covenant. And the priest, remember, celebrates the Mass as *alter Christus* (“another Christ”) and *in persona Christi* (“in the person of Christ”). And so, just as Christ willingly accepted and received His Cross, so the priest reverences the altar with a holy kiss.

- Fr. Lewis