

5th Sunday in Ordinary Time, Year A
St. Januarius' 5:00 p.m. and 10:00 a.m. and St. Patrick's 8:00 a.m.
Isaiah 58:7-10
1 Corinthians 2:1-5
Matthew 5:13-16
February 6, 2011

Special Homily on the Introductory Rites

Jesus tells us that we are “the salt of the earth.” We use salt for food in two ways. We use it to add flavor to our food and as a preservative for food. As the “salt of the earth,” we are called to add flavor to the world and to preserve the world. We do this by sharing our faith.

What do we do to be strengthened in our faith? We come to church. Hopefully, each time we come to church we feel renewed in our faith. But sometimes we don't.

Sometimes we can come to church week after week more out of habit or obligation than anything else. You might say that we just “get used to Mass.”

Don't we get used to other things? For example, a person might start with one cup of coffee to get started. Then, one cup becomes two and then three . . . As we just used to something we need more to get the same result. How do we get more of Mass?

Well, in terms of “quantity” one might think of coming to Mass more often. Now, coming to Mass often is a good thing. Mass every Sunday is a good thing (and Daily Mass if you can) but it isn't just a question of the “quantity of Mass.”

I think the solution to “getting more out of Mass” lies in being able to understand the Mass better. Sometimes, when we learn about Mass as little children, the lessons we are taught are how-to's and memorizing the prayers.

But don't our actions and our words mean more when we understand *why* we do it? Mass really isn't any different. The church has a saying, "lex orandi, lex credendi" → what we pray is what we believe but we need to understand what we are doing.

This is not small task but to begin helping each of us understand the Mass better, our homilies for today and the next three Sundays are going to help us understand why we celebrate Mass the way we do.

We're going to look at Mass in order. So, today we begin with the Introductory Rites. The heart of the Mass is the Liturgy of the Word and the Liturgy of the Eucharist but before we can get to those parts, we need a beginning.

Why not jump right into the Mass? Why do we *need* introductory rites? We have them to help draw us into the liturgy we come to celebrate.

We live in a busy world. We try to do a lot of multi-tasking. I don't know about you but I don't do well with multi-tasking. It isn't that I can't do it but when I do it I know I am not giving whatever I am doing my full attention (doesn't Mass deserve our full attention?). And I can't jump from one thing to the next without a transition time.

In a sense, *transition time* is exactly what the introductory rites are for. Whether our lives are going great or life is difficult we come to church with things on our mind. Sometimes, it might be just trying to get the family to church on time. Sometimes, it might be wondering how we are going to pay our bills this month? On the good side, maybe we just got great news and are excited about that.

Whatever is going on in our lives, we *gather together* to give thanks to God for the good things in our lives and to seek God's help in the difficulties in our lives.

We gather together. Really, Mass begins for us as we come to church. Our effort in gathering shows our desire to *experience* God. We come to church as individuals and as some families and form a community.

The Introductory Rites for Mass begin with the procession. Only the altar servers, lector, (deacon), and priest enter in the procession but it is a sign of how we all *gather together* at Mass as a community. As we sing together the processional hymn, we unite as a community.

Then, the priest leads us as we make the Sign of the Cross, a simple gesture but a profound statement of faith, made mindful of the words of St. Paul, “For I resolved to know nothing while I was with you except, Jesus Christ, and him crucified.”

We are here because we know Jesus was crucified for us.

The priest greets the people with words like “The Grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with all of you.” Grace, love, and fellowship are what we seek with God. And these words too can be found at the beginning or end of many of Paul’s letters in the New Testament.

Next, we have the Penitential Rite. We come to church because we know we need God. We know this because we don’t always do as we should and we need to admit that to open ourselves to God’s love. (Still need to go to Confession).

And because we know of God’s forgiveness we can give *glory to God* in the Gloria (which opens with words from scripture).

Then, and only then, we pray. The priest says “Let us pray” and then we pause. The pause is not to give time for the altar server to come over with the book. No, the

pause is to give each of us time to collect our own thoughts and prayers to offer them to God. (Silence is for reflection).

Such simple acts make up the Introductory Rites but it all is part of our faith, to open ourselves to the God's word that we have already used in prayer and will hear in the Liturgy of the Word that we will talk about next week.