

## The Worshipping Assembly at Mass

In Liturgy, we do not simply remember the past. No, the mystery of our salvation is present to us. This happens because the liturgy is *opus Dei*. By God's grace we enter into God's own life. Thus, liturgy is not fundamentally something we do. But an action, a mystery that we receive, that we remain open to, that we are drawn into.

–Bishop Arthur Serratelli

The celebration of Mass is a corporate act, an act of the whole assembly gathered for worship. All the particular ministries serve this corporate function (*General Instruction of the Roman Missal* [GIRM],27). In the Mass, the Church is joined to the action of Christ, “the high point both of the action by which God sanctifies the world in Christ and of the worship that the human race offers to the Father, adoring him through Christ, the Son of God, in the Holy Spirit” (GIRM,16). We are joined to this divine action through Baptism, which incorporates us into the risen Christ. This action, which lies at the center of the whole Christian life (GIRM,16) is not initiated by us but by God acting in and through the Church as the body of the risen Christ. It becomes our action only to the extent that we give ourselves to this mystery of redemptive worship. The liturgy is designed to bring about in all those who make up the worshipping assembly “a full participation of the faithful, both in body and mind, a participation burning with faithful, hope, and charity... ”(GIRM,18). To the extent that we are able to participate in this way, the work of redemption becomes personally effective for each of us. By such participation, the *General Instruction* says, we make the actions and prayers of the liturgy our own; we enter more fully into our personal communion with Christ's redeeming act and perfect worship (see GIRM,54, 55, etc.).

In the celebration of Mass the faithful are “a holy people, a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people of his own” (1 Peter 2:9) they give thanks to God and offer the Victim not only through the hands of the priest but also together with him and learn to offer themselves. They should endeavor to make this clear by their deep sense of reverence for God and their charity toward brothers and sisters who share with them in the celebration (GIRM,95). They should become one body, whether by hearing the word of God, or joining in prayers and liturgical song, or above all by offering the sacrifice together and sharing together in the Lord's Table (GIRM,96).

Because the whole liturgy is a corporate act of the gathered assembly (GIRM,34; Catechism of the Catholic Church 1144), there are certain parts of the Mass that are to be done by the whole assembly, the congregation of the faithful and all the ministers, in order to express the corporate nature of this act. Through these actions, the entire congregation of the faithful joins itself to Christ in acknowledging the great things that God has done and in offering the sacrifice (GIRM,78).

These acts include:

- ◆ Listening with reverence to the readings of God's word (GRIM,29)
- ◆ Engaging in the dialogue of prayer through acclamations, greetings, and responses to spoken and sung prayers (GRIM,34-37) in a tone suitable to the text (GRIM,38);
- ◆ Joining in an action through common postures and gestures (GRIM,42);
- ◆ Participating in communal silence (GRIM,45);
- ◆ Because of their baptismal dignity, letting themselves be included in the offering symbolized by incensation (GRIM,75);
- ◆ Participating in the greeting of peace as a sign of ecclesial communion with each other (GRIM,82);
- ◆ Participating in specific spoken prayers and other texts, namely:
  - > the formula of general confession during the Penitential Act (GRIM,51);
  - > the Creed (GRIM,67-68);
  - > the Prayer of the Faithful (GRIM,69);
  - > the Lord's Prayer (GRIM,81);
  - > the prayer of humility before sacramental Communion (GRIM,84);
- ◆ Participating in the offering during the Eucharistic Prayer, which is spoken or chanted by the Priest alone, but in which all internally should join as the Church to offer the "spotless Victim to the Father in the Holy Spirit" and "offer their very selves, and so day by day to be brought, through the mediation of Christ, into unity with God and with each other, so that at least God may be all in all" (GRIM,79f);
- ◆ Participating in liturgical song, because singing is a way of expressing both the corporate nature of the act of worship and the intense union to be achieved between God and the Church in Christ through the Holy Spirit. Singing is also an act which unifies and focuses the individual (GRIM,39), thus encouraging that participation in body and spirit that is conscious, active, full, and motivated by faith, hope, and charity (GRIM,18). These songs and acclamations are normally to be sung, in whole or in part, by all the participants:
  - > Entrance Chant (GRIM,48);
  - > *Kyrie, eleison* (Lord, have mercy) (GRIM,52)
  - > *Gloria* (GRIM,53)
  - > Responsorial Psalm (GRIM,61);
  - > Acclamation before the Gospel (GRIM,62);
  - > Song at the Preparation of the Gifts (GRIM,74)
  - > *Sanctus* (Holy, Holy, Holy), *Mystery of Faith*, and *Amen* (GRIM,79, 151);
  - > The Lord's Prayer (GRIM,81);
  - > *Agnus Dei* (Lamb of God) (GRIM,83);
  - > The optional psalm/canticle/hymn after Communion (GRIM,88).
- ◆ For those who are properly disposed (GRIM,80), partaking in Holy Communion, receiving in the bread and wine consecrated at this Mass the Lord's Body and Blood, in the same way that the Apostles received them from Christ's own hands (GRIM,72).