

What will be Different at Mass?

The Introductory Rites: The Greeting and the Act of Penitence

The Introductory Rites begin with a few simple words of dialogue between the priest and the people. By their nature, dialogues foster and bring about communion between the priest and all the members of the assembly. They are an outward sign that this is a communal celebration and that we, priest and people, are about to enter into an important liturgical act.

We begin our communal prayer the same way we begin all prayer, “In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.” The ancient words and gesture of the Sign of the Cross are not changing.

What follows will change a bit. The priest will say “The Lord be with you.” This line is often used as a greeting or as words of encouragement in Scripture. The people will respond, “And with your spirit.” This response is a more literal translation of *et cum spiritu tuo*. It can be found in several places in Scripture, especially in the writings of Saint Paul.

The new language not only better harmonizes with the Scriptures, but more directly reflects the theology that through baptism the Spirit of God dwells in all of us and unites us as one body of Christ. In addition, this will be more in harmony with what other language groups, such as the Spanish, French, Germans and Italians have been using for more than 40 years. This same exchange is repeated elsewhere in Mass, before the Gospel, before the Eucharistic Prayer, at the Sign of Peace, and in the Concluding Rite.

There are two other options for this greeting during the Introductory Rites. “The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the communion of the Holy Spirit be with you all” which can be found in the conclusion of Saint Paul’s Second Letter to the Corinthians or “Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.” To both, we will respond “And with your spirit.”

With these few words of reverence and mutual respect, we acknowledge the Trinity and embark upon our celebration of the paschal mystery, that Christ lived, died, and rose for our salvation. It is a journey we began at baptism and a mystery we enter into most fully at each celebration of the Eucharist.

Following the reform of the liturgy of the Second Vatican Council, a brief penitential rite was added to the Mass which finds its source in both Scripture and tradition. Presently, this act of penitence has several options. Each begins with an invitation by the priest to recall our sins and a pause for silent reflection. We may all respond by praying the *Confiteor*, a prayer that acknowledges the social dimension of sin. The new translation of this prayer restores the “through my fault, through my fault, through my most grievous fault.”

Alternatively, we may respond to a series of invocations addressed to Christ. What was once a long litany, was shortened in the sixth century and now consists of three verses that conclude with the ancient Greek response, *Kyrie eleison, Christe eleison, Kyrie eleison*. Saint Paul used the word *kyrios* to acknowledge Christ and his divinity. We also may respond in English, “Lord, have mercy; Christ, have mercy; Lord, have mercy.”

Another option uses Scripture. This is followed by the “Lord, have mercy” in Greek or English. The final option may be used on Sundays, especially during the Easter season. Water is blessed and sprinkled on the people as a reminder of their baptism and the reconciliation brought about by Christ. The *Asperges* rite comes from Psalm 51 “Cleanse me of sin with hyssop, that I may be purified.” During Eastertide, this verse is replaced by the *Vidi Aquam* a text about water flowing from the temple.

Each of these rites concludes with the priest’s absolution “May almighty God have mercy on us, forgive us our sins, and bring us to everlasting life.” Though these words lack the efficacy of the sacrament of penance they are a fitting reminder that we all seek God’s mercy, especially as we come together to celebrate his sacred mysteries.

Adapted from Rita Thiron, Director of the Office of Worship for the Diocese of Lansing