

What will be Different at Mass?

## The Gloria and the Liturgy of the Word

The Gloria is a type of “doxology”, that is a word of praise. Although there are several doxologies in the Mass, the Gloria is known as the “Great Doxology.” It is a Christian hymn modeled after the psalms and canticles of the Bible. Originally it was used as an Easter hymn and at the conclusion of Morning Prayer. It can be found in early Christian sources dating from the Fourth Century.

The Gloria is often called the angelic hymn because its first words are taken from the angels’ greeting to the shepherds at Bethlehem: “Glory to God in the highest and on earth peace to those on whom his favor rests.” (Luke 2:14) This song of praise was first incorporated into the Pope’s Christmas Mass in the 6<sup>th</sup> Century. By the 11<sup>th</sup> Century it was sung at all Masses on Sundays and special occasions.

Since it is a hymn, it is always to be sung. Originally, it was sung by the assembly with a simple melody. In later centuries it came to be sung exclusively by the choir. Today, in most churches, it is either sung by the entire assembly, or by the people alternating with the cantor or choir.

In the new translation of the Roman Missal, you’ve probably noticed some new phrases. They are not in our current translation, but they do appear in the Latin original:

“We praise you, we bless you, we adore you, we glorify you, Lord God, heavenly King, O God, almighty Father.”

Although these phrases may strike us as repetitive, they are a sign of our meager attempts to offer God fitting praise.

The word “sins” is now pluralized, acknowledging that Jesus takes away sins from each and all of us. The word “begotten” has been added to the phrase “Only begotten Son of the Father” to give a fuller expression to this important doctrine: God is the Father of Jesus, and Jesus is the only Son of God.

The words we will now use in singing the Gloria are of course familiar, although they seem (to us) to be arranged in a new order. This ordering, which is actually a more authentic expression of the original Latin text, allows us to prayerfully explore our relationship with the only begotten Son. Because he has come to take away the sins of the world, we call upon his mercy. Because he takes away the sins of the world, we are confident that he will receive our prayer. Because he is seated at the right hand of the Father, we are confident that on the day of judgment we will be shown mercy.

Although the Gloria is a customary part of the Introductory Rites of Mass, there are Seasons during which it is omitted. In Advent the angels' great song of praise is silent. Only with the birth of the King of Kings, do we lift our voices in this hymn. Similarly, throughout the Lenten Season, we fast from this great offering. Only at the Easter Vigil, as the Gloria rings out, does the Church awake from its slumbering to the light and life brought about by the Resurrection.

Many composers have arranged beautiful musical settings of the Gloria. But there is no more fitting offering, than God's people, in this local assembly, joined to the entire Church in a sacrifice of praise.

Following the Gloria, the Opening Prayer of Mass is offered by the presider. The assembly is then invited to listen to God's Word. God continues to speak to us, even today, through scriptures written many years ago. Because we believe that his word is living and active, we are called to attentive listening.

As we prepare to hear the gospel text, we'll notice one slight change in our dialogue with the deacon or priest. Following the introduction of the gospel passage: "A reading from the holy Gospel according to..." we'll respond: "Glory to you, **Q** Lord." It's not a huge change, but sometimes the little things trip us up, and teach us to be even more attentive to the work we undertake.

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