

# Believe, Celebrate, Live

#1: GATHERING

April 11, 2010

The Eucharist is a mystery to be BELIEVED, and CELEBRATED, and LIVED! This Easter season a spoken reflection at each Mass and a series of bulletin inserts will help us explore the Mass more deeply. **In this issue, we'll start at the beginning: with the gathering of the assembly, the entrance procession, and the opening song.**

## Called to Worship

"It's Sunday morning. You decide to go to Mass. Or rather, God decides for you. God draws each of us out of our solitude and isolation, and makes us into a people that lives by faith and whose unity is Christ," writes Cardinal Jean-Marie Lustiger, the late Archbishop of Paris. "Yes, we should consider it a grace of God to have been 'chosen' to be members of the People of God, 'to serve in his presence,' to be gathered into his Church, the Body of Christ."

We come to Mass not because we happen to have time or because we feel like it or because we have to. *We come in response to a call.* In coming to Mass, Sunday after Sunday, we are letting ourselves be gathered by God.

In gathering his people together, God makes his Church visible. Disparate individuals become something altogether new. They become a community entrusted with a task that no one else can accomplish for them: to be the Body of Christ in *this* place, at *this* time. The whole is infinitely greater than its parts.

## The Entrance

The entrance procession doesn't begin with the entrance hymn! Perhaps you could say it begins at 6:30am on Sunday morning, when our sacristan arrives to turn on the lights and open the Cathedral's doors. This great procession continues as the faithful arrive from every direction – on foot, by car, by bus, by taxi, by van, even by ferry! – greet one another, and take their places in the church. This is the great entrance procession—the vested ministers simply bring up the rear. The formal entrance is an emblem of what has already begun to happen: it is "a visual expression of the people becoming a liturgical community" (Johnson).

But, of course, there is more, because the procession is not just about us. It's about Christ's living presence in our midst. As the cross enters the church, we stand: the simplest possible gesture, and



yet a powerful sign of attention and respect. The cross leads us, and the solemn, deliberate pace reminds us that the pilgrim people of God have nothing to fear: their destination is sure and their guide cannot go astray. Candles are signs of a living presence; and the candles carried with the cross remind us that the cross we adore is a living cross, a flowering tree, alive and life-giving.

The procession points to other signs of Christ as well. Servers carry candles around the Book of the Gospels, because, as the Second Vatican Council teaches us, "Christ himself speaks when the scriptures are proclaimed in the Church."

The priest presider is another sign of Christ's presence. This is perhaps most obvious in the vestments he wears. As a 4th-century commentator wrote, "their outer garb is more sublime than they are": the presider "does not wear his usual clothing nor does he wear his ordinary outer garment; a vestment of fine, bright linen envelops him." The vestment is an outward sign of an interior reality, the sacrament by which the priest is enabled to act *in persona Christi*, in the person of Christ, in the

celebration of the Eucharist.

The priest is the last to enter, for when he “joins the celebrating community, the Church, the Body of the risen Lord, with its head and its members, is signified in its totality” (Deiss).

## Powerful Songs

The song that accompanies the entrance of the ministers is an essential part of the gathering of the people of God. It doesn't simply set the mood or explain the theme of the day (though it can do both of these); it *accomplishes* something. “It is the first liturgical action of a people among whom Christ is active and present” (Johnson). Communal singing sounds like unity; and it helps to effect it. As the people join together in song, says Cardinal Lustiger, “a communion of prayer and adoration is formed between men and women until then separated and often strangers to one another. Together, with one heart, they begin to sing to God, the same acclamation or supplication.”

Trained or untrained, tuneful or tone-deaf, at Mass, we *all* sing. As the great Methodist preacher and composer John Wesley said, “Sing... let not a slight degree of weakness or weariness hinder you. If singing is a cross to you, take it up, and you will find it a blessing. Sing lustily and with a good courage.” Wesley knew that those who have sung and prayed together are no longer strangers: they have begun to experience their oneness in Christ. And St. Augustine felt the same way. “How I wept,” he wrote, “deeply



moved by your hymns, songs, and the voices that echoed through your Church! What emotion I experienced in them! Those sounds flowed into my ears, distilling the truth in my heart. A feeling of devotion surged within me, and tears streamed down my face—tears that did me good.”

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*Continue your exploration of the Mass with the sprinkling rite and the Gloria [www.stjames-cathedral.org/believe](http://www.stjames-cathedral.org/believe). Next week: THE WORD OF THE LORD.*

## For Further Reading

- *The Catechism of the Catholic Church* (1077-1112)
- Joseph Champlin. *The Mystery and Meaning of the Mass*
- Lucien Deiss. *The Mass*
- Jeremy Driscoll, OSB. *What Happens at Mass*.
- Lawrence J. Johnson. *The Mystery of Faith: A Study of the Structural Elements of the Mass*
- Cardinal Jean-Marie Lustiger. *The Mass*
- *Sacrosanctum Concilium: The Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy of the Second Vatican Council*

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## For Reflection and Discussion

- BELIEVE IT. In his homily for Palm Sunday, Father Ryan spoke about the Alleluia – “more than any other, the Alleluia is our true song as Christians.” What does it mean to be an Alleluia people? How is ours an Alleluia faith?
- CELEBRATE IT. What brings me to Mass Sunday after Sunday? What do I look forward to at Sunday Mass? Can I think of a time when the celebration of the Eucharist fully engaged me? What was different?
- LIVE IT. Where does my procession begin on Sunday mornings? Does the celebration of Mass connect to my daily life? Why – or why not? What do I expect from Sunday Mass? What does Mass expect from me?

