

Year of the Eucharist

October 2004 to October 2005

Part 8 in a series on
The Year of the Eucharist
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The Office of Rites and Sacraments
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The Structure of the Mass

As we bring to a close our reflection on the Introductory Rites of the Mass, we remember that the goal of these rites is to help us to prepare ourselves for the Liturgy of the Word and the Liturgy of the Eucharist, and to help us enter into the entire celebration as the one people God calls us to be, the Body of Christ.

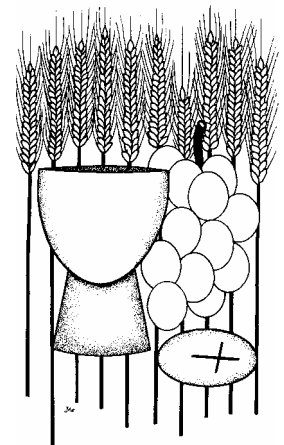
In my own reflection on the Introductory Rites this week, what came to mind was a surprise party I held a few years ago for my sister on her 50th birthday. I invited people from the various parts of her life: her professional peers, our family members, and her friends. In order to successfully surprise her, I asked everyone to gather one hour before my sister was to arrive. Although I was hosting the party in my home, there were some people whom I had never met. Also, many of the people who were important to my sister were not acquainted with each other. I remember being struck by the spirit of friendliness and the ease with which everyone related. The reason for this, of course, was that we were gathered to honor someone for whom we all cared deeply, someone who was an important part of each of our lives. It really didn't matter that some of us were strangers to each other because my sister was the reason for the gathering and everyone's attention was on making the event one that would be enjoyable and affirming for her.

That one-hour gathering before my sister's arrival at her party is akin to the Introductory Rites at Mass. The focus during that hour was to establish ourselves as a comfortable group who could pull together to make the birthday party a celebration that would be meaningful for my sister and for everyone gathered. Just as the priest offers a brief introduction to the Mass of the Day, before my sister's party, I provided some orientation so everyone would know what to expect and therefore be able to fully enter into the surprise party.

In a very real way, the Introductory Rites of the Mass are marked by a spirit of hospitality. It is a time to be welcomed, to "get comfortable" and to prepare ourselves for the celebration. We are welcomed first by Greeters / Hospitality Ministers at the doors of the church. We are invited to prepare our minds and our hearts as we quiet ourselves and listen to prelude music. The singing of a Gathering Song that encourages prayer because it has depth and a certain *singability* is another element of hospitality provided by music ministers as they lead us in song. The presider welcomes the assembly with the words of the formal Greeting, "*The Lord be with you*" and we respond, "*And also with you.*" And finally, we welcome each other by participating fully in every element of the Introductory Rites.

The Introductory Rites give us time and ample opportunities to remember and to profess this mystery of being part of a people called by God to live as Christ in the world. It would be good for each of us to ask ourselves if we are doing our part in these Rites.

Does my manner and level of participation encourage those around me to participate? Does my parish need more Greeters and should I be one? Do I sing whether what is being sung is my favorite or someone else's favorite? Do I give myself fully to what is happening in the moment? These and others might be helpful questions during this **Year of the Eucharist** as we each try to do our part to improve our parish Celebrations of the Eucharist.



FROM THE GENERAL INSTRUCTION ON THE ROMAN MISSAL...

The purpose of the Introductory Rites is to ensure that the faithful who come together as one establish communion and dispose themselves to listen properly to God's word and to celebrate the Eucharist worthily.

Text: Judy Gray
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