

St. Joseph Catholic Church
A Study of the Structural Elements of the Order of the Mass
29th Sunday in Ordinary Time - 16 October 2011

GLORY TO GOD

Historical Survey:

The Gloria is also known as the “*greater doxology*.” Some call it the “*Angelic Hymn*” since its first words echoes the hymns sung by the angels at Bethlehem at the Birth of Jesus. It has come down to us from the treasury of early Christian hymns modeled upon the psalms and canticles of the Bible. It has Eastern origins (Greek & Syrian) and eventually made its way into Western liturgies. There are historical records indicating that Popes from the 6th century on had used the “*Gloria in Excelsis Deo*” in their Christmas Masses in Rome. Bishops also used the “*Gloria*” when they presided at Sunday Masses and Feasts of Martyrs/Saints. Priests were allowed to use it only when they were celebrating the Easter Vigil Mass. By the 11th century, however, the “*Gloria*” became part of all Sunday Masses and used by all ordained priests - regardless of their office in the Church.

Since the “*Gloria*” is a hymn, it is recommended that it should be sung. Over the centuries, there were so many musical settings composed for this part of the Mass. Initially, these were all in Latin but eventually, since the liturgical reforms of Vatican II in 1963, the “*Gloria*” was set to music in the vernacular language as well. The 2010 English translation of the Roman Missal appropriated the original Latin text and is thus more faithful to the original “*Gloria*.”

Theological Reflection:

The “*Gloria*” is an ancient hymn that serves to unify the faithful in expressing their faith in a providential God and to Jesus Christ who assumed our humanity in order to save us. The highlight of this hymn is the “*Mystery of the Incarnation*” which is the highlight of the Christmas Season. The priest usually intones it and then the rest of the faithful are invited to sing it in unison. It is a joyful hymn and must be sung festively and with enthusiasm!

THE COLLECT or OPENING PRAYER

Historical Survey:

The use of the “Opening Prayer” or “Collect” dates back to the 5th century. The priest/preside begins it with an invitation: “*Let us pray.*” After a brief pause, the presider prays the “Collect.” The word “*collect*” or “*collecta*” in Ancient Gaul/ France means “gathers together.” It follows the ancient structure of a prayer: an address, a petition, and a conclusion (very much like the prayer that Jesus taught his disciples: “*Our Father*”). During the prayer of the “*Collect*,” the celebrant extends his hands - a gesture recalling the praying figures found in the catacombs of Rome (*orantes*). In the liturgical renewal after Vatican II in

1963, the Collect was designated as one of the 3 "Presidential Prayers" that is reserved for the presiding priest - which he prays on behalf of the congregation.

Theological Reflection:

The "Collect" is an "Invitation to Prayer." This is supposed to set the tone of the Eucharistic Celebration. Typically, but not always, it incorporates the theme of the scriptural readings on any given Sunday - especially the Gospel. When appropriate, this is the part of the Mass when a celebrant can be creative - but within limits. The priest/celebrant can add a phrase or two that anticipates the message of the scriptural readings. The presiding minister must keep in mind that the "Collect" is designed to make the attending congregation aware "that they are now in God's presence" (GIRM, no 54).

AMEN

Historical Survey:

The word "Amen" is found in both the Old Testament and the New Testament books of the Bible (Deuteronomy 27:15 ff.; 1 Corinthians 14:16). In fact, in the 4 Gospels of Mark, Matthew, Luke & John, our Lord Jesus Christ used "Amen" with frequency: "Amen, Amen I say to you ..." In this case, Jesus is emphasizing the truthfulness of his teachings. Otherwise, "Amen" is usually used in the context of a prayer, and it is used as a response. "Amen" is an ancient Hebrew word that means "verily" or "So Be It," which when appended to prayers, proclamations, or invitations (e.g. *The Body of Christ!*) marks the giving over of the responding person to the theological truth of what is being prayed or proclaimed by the priest/presider.

Theological Reflection:

Since the "Collect" or "Opening Prayer" is an invitation, it requires a response which comes in the form of "Amen." "Amen" is not simply an "agreement," nor even simply a statement of belief. It is a word of **personal** and **communal** conviction, commitment and surrender to God.