

## Part II

### HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

Since Christianity started out as an “*underground religion*,” meaning it was not practiced openly for fear of persecution, the first generations of Christians worshipped together clandestinely. They celebrated the Mass in secret places such as caves, catacombs, or in the privacy of homes. Therefore, the Mass that we have been celebrating continuously since Christ commanded his disciples to “*do this in memory of me*,” has domestic origins. In fact, early on, real food was actually served to the attending members. However, when Christianity became an accepted religion in the early part of the 3<sup>rd</sup> century, thanks to Emperor Constantine, not only did Christianity become an “*open religion*,” it also became the “*state religion*” of the Roman Empire. Christianity grew dramatically and it could not help but become an “*institutionalized religion*.” By the 4<sup>th</sup> century, big churches and cathedrals were built where liturgical celebrations were performed by priests for the laity. This also signaled the beginning of a more “*formal celebration*” of the Holy Eucharist or the Mass. Instead of “*actual food*,” it became necessary to serve the laity with a simpler but still “*true semblance of food and wine*.” Gone was the hushed informality of a clandestine gathering and it was substituted by a more formal ritual or celebration.

### INTRODUCTORY RITES

1. **ENTRANCE PROCESSION**: Once the people have gathered, the priest and ministers, clad in sacred vestments, go in procession to the altar in this order (*cf. GIRM*):
  - a. THURIFER - carrying a THURIBLE with BURNING INCENSE (if it's used)
  - b. CANDLES - lit and carried by candle bearers
  - c. CRUCIFIX - carried by an ACOLYTE
  - d. BOOK OF GOSPELS - carried ordinarily by a DEACON, LECTOR or an ACOLYTE
  - e. PRESIDERS/PRIEST

**Reflection**: The “*Entrance Procession*” is not just a functional action of solemnly introducing the priest and other ministers to the sanctuary; it is also a visual expression of the CHURCH, i.e. a people becoming a liturgical community, a people gathered together in generous response to God’s invitation. The “*Entrance Procession*” also visibly manifests the presence of Christ and the very nature of the CHURCH itself: it is ONE BODY composed of MEMBERS who possess distinct offices and ministries.

2. **ENTRANCE SONG**: This began as a formal music that accompanies the entrance procession sung by the *schola cantorum* (a trained body of singers). By the 8<sup>th</sup> & 9<sup>th</sup> centuries, an attempt was made to include the whole assembly in singing portions of the entrance song. For simpler celebrations, an independent chant called *Introit* was either sung or recited as soon as the priest reached the altar. The *Introit* could be a line from a Psalm, the Scripture or other sacred texts.

**Reflection**: The purpose of the Entrance Song is “*to open the celebration, foster the unity of those who have been gathered, introduce their thoughts to the mystery of the liturgical season or festivity, and accompany the procession of the priest and ministers.*” (*GIRM no. 47*) Thus, the primary purpose of a CANTOR or a CHOIR, is not to perform but to lead the assembly in singing together - to foster their unity as daughters and sons of God gathered to give thanks.