



## **MARY, MOTHER OF THE REDEEMER RCIA 2012 – 2013**

### **BASIC QUESTIONS THAT I ALWAYS WANTED TO ASK ABOUT THE CATHOLIC CHURCH?**

Almost everyone who has ever attended a Catholic Mass has seen and done things without knowing what they meant or the significance of the gesture. There are many questions about what we see and do at Mass that are never asked because most people think that everyone else knows the answers except them and therefore it would be embarrassing to admit to not knowing what some people believe are the fundamentals of Catholicism.

What follows are some of the basic questions that go unasked and regrettably unanswered, but are of significance to the faith. There are many more, so please ask.

## I. ON ENTERING THE CHURCH ...

1. Why are Catholics one of the few Christian faiths to make the sign of the cross?

The sign of the Cross is common among both Catholics and Orthodox. It is considered a sign of reverence and a remembrance that Jesus died on the Cross to bring salvation to the world. It simply fell out of use among other churches following the Reformation.

2. What is the symbolism of dipping our fingers in holy water and making the sign of the cross?

It recalls our baptism into Christ, which makes us members of the Church, the Body of Christ.

3. Are we to bless ourselves with Holy Water upon entering and leaving the Church? Is it proper to make the sign of the cross when genuflecting before you enter and exit a pew?

The traditional Catholic custom is to bless oneself with Holy Water on entering the Church and when leaving. When genuflecting, making the sign of the cross is optional. It is not an inherent part of the genuflection, so it can be made or omitted.

4. Why and when should we genuflect?

Genuflection is a sign of reverence to the Blessed Sacrament. So, it is customary and proper to genuflect whenever we come into or leave the presence of the Blessed Sacrament reserved in the Tabernacle.

Genuflection is also proper at the reference in the Nicene Creed to Jesus becoming incarnate as man on the feast of the Annunciation (March 25) and the feast of Christmas.

5. What does the light in the nave (near the Tabernacle) symbolize?

It is called a Sanctuary Lamp. It is lighted when the Blessed Sacrament is reserved in the Tabernacle.

6. Who lights the Sanctuary Lamp? Does it stay lit even when the Blessed Sacrament lies in repose in the Chapel?

The traditional lamp was fueled with bee's wax. The one at Holy Spirit is electrified. It is always lit when the Blessed Sacrament is reserved in the Tabernacle. It is extinguished, for example, when the Blessed Sacrament is in repose in the Chapel during the Triduum.

## II. THE PARTICIPANTS AT MASS

1. Who is on the Altar (in the Sanctuary) during Mass (other than the Priest and Altar Servers)?
  - a. Lectors: Those who proclaim the Word of God (other than the Gospel) are the Lectors. There are instituted Lectors and deputed (deputized) Lectors. Both read the first and second reading. At Sunday Mass, a Cantor will sing the psalm that is proclaimed between the first and second reading.
  - b. Deacons: A deacon can do some of the things a priest can do, but not everything a priest can do. You can tell the difference between a priest and a deacon by the way they wear their stole. The stole is the strip of fabric that a priest wears around the back of his neck and hangs down the front. A deacon also wears a stole, but he wears it over his left shoulder drawn diagonally across his chest and fastened at his right hip. Only priests and deacons (and Bishops and the Pope, who are also ordained Deacons and Priests) may proclaim the Gospel at Mass.

### III. WHY WE DO WHAT WE DO AT MASS

#### 1. Are there responses that I should memorize?

There are responses during Mass that are unchanging. For example, whenever the Priest or Deacon says “The Lord be with you”, the response is always “And with your spirit.”

When the Priest or Deacon calls upon the mercy of God, we repeat what the Priest or Deacon says. The first and third will be “Lord have mercy” (or if said in Greek “Kyrie Eleison” ) and the second will be “Christ have mercy” (or in Greek “Christe Eleison”).

When the Lector finishes the first and second readings, they will say, “The word of the Lord.” The congregation responds, “Thanks be to God.”

After the first reading, at each Mass the Psalmist/Cantor will read a part of the Psalm that we repeat when he or she signals the congregation.

When the Priest or Deacon starts to read the Gospel (and while you cross yourself on the forehead, the lips and the chest with your thumb to show that Christ is on you mind, on your lips and in

your heart) you say, "Glory to You Lord." When he finishes with the Gospel we say, "Praise to You Lord Jesus Christ."

After the Homily, the Nicene Creed is prayed in unison.

When the intercessory prayers (Prayer of the Faithful) are read at each break we say, "Lord hear our prayer."

At the end the Priest will bless everyone and you respond with an "Amen" and then the Priest or Deacon will end the Mass by telling you to go forth and spread the word and the response is "Thanks be to God."

\*\*\*There are other responses that will become second nature.

## 2. How does Mass begin?

Mass always begins with an entrance hymn. The general order of the procession is that the cross always is first (unless there is incense), followed by the altar servers, lector, (any concelebrating priests or additional deacons) followed by the deacon and priest.

The deacon will carry the Book of the Gospels (or if there is no deacon, generally the lector although the priest may as well). All in the procession (except the person carrying the Book of the Gospel) will genuflect at the foot of the altar. The Book of the

Gospel will be placed on the altar. The priest and deacon will also go behind the altar and kiss it as a sign of reverence for Christ, whose altar it is. (This gesture is repeated with the Book of the Gospel after the Gospel is proclaimed by the deacon or priest).

3. What do you call the podium where the readings and Gospel are preach?

The stand that the lectionary is on for the readings and from which the Gospel is proclaimed is called the "ambo." The word is of Greek origin and supposed to signify a mountain or elevation. Amboes are believed to have taken their origin from the raised platform from which the Jewish rabbis read the Scriptures to the people, and they were first introduced into Catholic churches during the fourth century.

4. Why do we stand at the Gospel? How do I know when to stand?

We stand to call our attention to the Gospel, other prayers, and actions that are most important during Mass. Standing is a sign of respect. We also stand to pray together: when the priest says, "*Let us pray,*" it is a cue for us to stand.

5. What is the meaning behind the making of the cross on our forehead, mouth and heart before the reading of the Gospel?

It mirrors the blessing a Deacon receives prior to proclaiming the Gospel - "may God be in your mind, on your lips and in your heart as you proclaim His holy Gospel."

6. During the Profession of Faith, why do the clergy and some parishioners bow their head at "born of the Virgin Mary and became Man?"

The tradition of the Church over the centuries was to genuflect in reverence at that phrase because it refers to the mystery of the Incarnation, Jesus taking on a human nature in order to bring salvation to the world. The custom of the genuflection is preserved now only on the feast of Christmas and on the feast of the Annunciation. The rest of the year, a bow takes the place of the genuflection.

7. What is the purpose of the cover the priest has over the Chalice during the Eucharistic Prayer?

The "cover" is called the Pall. It has been used for centuries. The purpose for it was to prevent dust or other foreign objects from falling in the Chalice. Until after the reforms following the Second Vatican Council, it was a liturgical requirement that the Pall be kept on the

chalice except during the Consecration and Communion. That requirement was abolished. So it is now a practical decision for the priest to make. Some priests like to adopt the older practice.

8. Why do we ring the chimes or bells during the Eucharistic Prayer?

From a scriptural/liturgical perspective, the ringing of bells meant that there was about to be a divine presence so some say that the ringing of bells can be traced to scripture or early liturgy. But the bells originally had a more practical purpose. The Mass was in Latin, and the words were spoken quietly by the priest. Before microphones were used and before the Mass was in English, the bells would be rung to let the people who couldn't hear know that the most important part of the Mass was taking place. Traditionally, and in many Catholic churches even today, the bells are rung one time when the priest extended his hands over the chalice in blessing right before the Consecration. (The Epiclesis) This was a signal to the congregation that the Consecration was about to take place. Then, when the words of Consecration had been spoken the priest would genuflect, raise the Host (Chalice) to be visible to the people, and then genuflect

again. The bell was rung at each of those steps – so the triple ring became common.

In some parishes, the bells are rung only once when the Host (Chalice) is raised; in others, there are three distinct bell tones. In some churches, the bells are also rung when the priest consumes the host and precious blood. The difference is more as a continuity of tradition than as a requirement.

9. How should we hold our hands during the "Our Father"?

There is really no right way and no wrong way for anyone but the Celebrant. For him, the correct posture is the hands spread apart in prayer. The traditional posture for all others is the "Orans," that is, hands joined together in a prayer posture. You may notice that some people like to hold hands during the Our Father, and perhaps even when visiting other churches you might notice that the entire congregation does it. If members of an individual family, or close friends, want to do that, it's fine. However, since hand-holding is not a liturgical action, if you are one of those who prefer to hold hands during the Our Father, please be sensitive to the fact that the people beside you may not wish to do so.

10. Why do Catholics pause at the end of the Lord's Prayer for the priest to add his part and then finish?

What the priest says at the end of the Lord's Prayer is not an interruption but a prayer continuing the final sentiment of the Our Father. The doxology, which follows that second prayer - "For the kingdom, the power and the glory are yours now and forever" - was never part of the Lord's Prayer. Through a mistranslation of the Missal after the Reformation in England, the "Deliver us O Lord..." prayer was omitted, and the doxology was put adjacent to the Lord's Prayer. Over the course of time, it morphed into being part of the prayer and is the common usage in many of the Protestant and Evangelical churches.

11. Should parishioners remain kneeling after Communion until all the extra hosts are put back in the Tabernacle?

The general custom has been to kneel until the Blessed Sacrament is placed in the Tabernacle. But it is equally appropriate to sit. The primary consideration should be reverence and meditative prayer, whether this comes through silence or through a Thanksgiving hymn.

12. Why does the Priest or Deacon purify the chalices on the Altar?

The purification can be done at the Altar or at a side table or it can be done after Mass. The Holy See (Vatican) issued a directive in 2007 that the ritual purification must be done by a priest, deacon or installed acolyte. Extraordinary Ministers of the Holy Communion assist the clergy at all Masses, but since 2007, the ritual purification is to be completed *only* by priest, deacon or installed acolyte .

#### IV. Other common questions

##### 13. Why do we call Catholic priests "Father"?

There is a lot more to this question but basically, it goes back to the New Testament traditions of Peter, Paul and John, all of whom addressed the people to whom they wrote as their "children." It connotes spiritual fatherhood.

##### 14. What are the rules of *fasting* before Communion and why is it done?

The Eucharistic fast is intended to focus our minds on the solemnity of what we are doing in receiving Communion. Originally, the fast was from midnight before receiving Communion, later that was reduced to three hours for food, and now it is one hour from food and liquids other than water and medicine.

For a lay person, the fast is *one hour before receiving*, not an hour before Mass begins. This applies to everyone who is of age to receive Communion. In case of severe hardship or very advanced age or illness, even the one hour can be dispensed.

15. Why is it that at a Catholic wedding the father of the bride is not asked, "Who gives this woman to be married to this man?"

At a Catholic wedding, the true celebrants of the Sacrament of Marriage are the bride and groom; the Priest (or Deacon in some instances) is only a witness. The parties in a marriage "give" themselves to each other; they are not "given" by or to someone else. The Catholic ritual has always reflected that as a reality of the Sacrament. Even in the days of "arranged" marriages, the parties still had free consent, so they were not "given in marriage."

16. Why Don't We Sing "Alleluia" During Lent?

The "Alleluia" and "Gloria" are joyful chants, with Alleluia being the primary chant of the Easter Season - He is risen, Alleluia. Lent is a penitential period when we express sorrow for the sin that put Jesus on the Cross. Instead of the joyful Alleluia, we sing an alternative hymn which still recognizes Jesus as Lord.