

The Mass (Part XI)

by Fr. Tim Church

THE GLORIA

The Gloria follows the penitential rite and is a very interesting hymn, rich in history. A retelling of its past is beyond the scope of a short article, but suffice it to say that it was probably first a popular song that all the people loved to sing. It is now an official liturgical song, glorifying the Holy Trinity.

Some of the more intricate patterns of the song are also beyond this article, but we can see the three-fold pattern of the Trinity very easily:

The first part of the song “gives” glory to God the Father and he is “named” through a series of titles (“Lord,” King,” “God”).

The second and much longer section of the song glorifies the Son.

With the mention of the “Lamb of God” the song focuses attention on the mystery of salvation. The Holy Spirit is only mentioned briefly, a pattern that is also seen in the Creed.

The Gloria is only used on Sunday and special Holy Days. The reservation of the song for these days seems to assist in heightening the festivity and celebration of these times. It is not, of course, a Christmas song, even though the first phrase is indeed the song of the angels recorded in the birth narrative in Luke’s Gospel (2:14). In fact, there are a great many Biblical images contained in the song, from both the Old and New Testaments. At the heart of the hymn is the acclamation of Christ as the “Lamb of God:”

*Lord Jesus Christ,
only Son of the Father,
Lord God, Lamb of God,
you take away the sin of the world:
have mercy on us;*

The act of redemption, accomplished by the sacrifice of the “Lamb,” is the center of our praise of God, the very reason that we gather for the Mass.

A variety of responsive songs have developed for the singing of the Gloria. Recent changes in the norms may limit the variety of these as they must remain faithful to the text of the Gloria. The Gloria can be said by the congregation if there is no provision for music (although it is a little like saying “Take Me Out to the Ballgame” during the seventh inning stretch).

The “prayer of the day” (or collect) follows either the penitential rite or the Gloria. It acts as both a conclusion to the introductory rite and as a proper introduction to the Mass of the day.

Every Mass and every day has a proper collect, even though there are times when the prayer from the previous Sunday is used. The object of the prayer is to summarize our shared focus in the Mass, offering this to God as an expression of our longing and of our faith. This “focus” is reflected in the readings and other prayers at the Mass, as well as the homily and music.

The prayer is introduced with an ancient direction from the priest: “Let us pray.” This is, of course, a very general direction. The new order for the Mass allows for an option that the direction be more specific: “Let us pray that God will make us one in mind and heart.” (21st Sunday in Ordinary Time)

Following this the Church is directed to pray silently, each individual formulating their own petitions. Then, the priest “summarizes” everyone’s into the one prayer, the “collect”.

The Collect is almost always addressed to the Father. Prayers addressed to Jesus Christ are actually not commonly found in the ancient Church. Prayers to the Holy Spirit, while theologically correct, do not occur in the Sacramentary (or missal), the book containing the Mass. We are taught to pray in the Spirit, through the Son, to the Father.

“To the only God, our savior, through Jesus Christ our Lord be glory, majesty, power, and authority from ages past, now, and for ages to come. Amen.” (Jude 1:25)