

LITURGY BYTES

The Mass – Why We Do What We Do – Part 1

Catholics seem to know what to do and what comes next at Mass. One of the basic marks of our way of praying is ritual: we do things over and over. When the priest says, “The Lord be with you,” without any thought or hesitation the congregation answers, “and with your Spirit.” The priest says, “let us pray,” and the congregation stands up.

Well, our daily lives have their rituals too. There are set ways of greeting people, eating, responding to a text, etc. I am sure you agree. When we are accustomed to a certain way of doing things, we seldom ask why we do it that way. Right? Well in the Mass, we also have many ritual actions which we perform without asking why.

I read that a good way to describe the Mass is to say that it is Holy Thursday, Good Friday and Easter Sunday made present today in ritual. It is not merely a meal which reminds us of the Last Supper, or a Passion play which helps recall Good Friday, or a sunrise service which celebrates the Lord’s Resurrection.

The basic shape of the ritual of the Mass can be described as a meal. This is not to say it is “just another meal” or that we are ignoring the Mass as sacrifice. Not at all. The point is, the shape of the Mass, even when viewed as sacrifice, is that of a meal.

When friends gather for a meal, they sit and talk. Eventually, they move to the table, say grace, pass the food and eat and drink, and finally take their leave and go home.

Over the next few columns, we will take a look at some of these rituals and what they mean and why we do them. We will follow how we gather for a meal and see the ritual acts of gathering, storytelling, meal sharing and commissioning.

Please be sure to continue watching this column as we explain and understand the above-mentioned acts that consist of the Sunday celebration we participate in.

Have a blessed, healthy, peaceful, and safe week ahead! ~~~~ *Michèle Hall*

