

The Mass

The Parts of the Mass - Part 3

The Gloria and the Collect (Opening Prayer)

The tone of the liturgy now shifts from repentance (Kyrie) to joyful praise of God, as we enter into the prayer we know as the Gloria. The opening line of this prayer is taken from the words sung by the angels in the fields of Bethlehem, announcing to the shepherds the good news of the birth of Jesus Christ: “Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace to those on whom his favor rests” (Luke 2:14).

It is very fitting that we sing the words of the Gloria at the beginning of Mass (except in Advent & Lent), because there is a sense in which the Mass makes present the mystery of Christmas once again. As God was made manifest to the world through the birth of baby Jesus 2000 years ago, so he is made sacramentally present upon the altar at the consecration at Mass. Therefore, we prepare ourselves to welcome Christ by repeating those same joyful words the angels used to announce the birth of Jesus to the world.

The rest of the Gloria is full of words from Sacred Scripture. In fact, the Gloria is like a mosaic of biblical titles for God and common biblical expressions of praise. The prayer, itself, dates back to the early Church. Catholics who pray the Gloria join the great men and women throughout history – and even the angels and the communion of saints – in their praise of God for his work of salvation and for his own glory.

The Gloria follows a Trinitarian pattern, beginning with praise of God the Father who is addressed as “God, almighty Father” and “heavenly King”. We praise him for his omnipotence and reign over heaven and earth. We address him as “Lord God, heavenly King, O God, almighty Father.” We do not stop with a mere mention of God’s power and kingship. We go on to praise him ultimately as our heavenly Father. Just as a good father wants what’s best for his children, God’s power is in perfect harmony with his loving will that always seeks what is good for us and that provides for all our needs.

The next part of the Gloria tells us the story of Christ. The Gloria sums up the story of Christ’s saving work moving from his coming, to his redeeming death, to his triumphant resurrection and ascension into heaven. Perhaps the most remarkable line in this section is when we pray, “you alone are the Lord.” Lord

(Kyrios in Greek) is a biblical title for God. For us in our modern world, this may not seem very noteworthy. However, in the ancient world, “Lord” was a title reserved to the Emperor’s of the Roman Empire. Thus, while calling Jesus “Lord” associated him with God, it was also extremely counter-imperial, and therefore very dangerous. The New Testament proclaims that Jesus is Lord, not Caesar. Someone in the ancient Roman world who said that Jesus alone is the Lord would be considered an enemy to the Roman Empire. Many early Christians, in fact, died for this belief, refusing to worship the emperor or the Roman gods. This line from the Gloria challenges us today to be loyal to Jesus Christ and his commandments above anything else in the world, whether it be a job, possessions, financial security, or family.

Finally, the Gloria concludes with mentioning the Holy Spirit. Jesus Christ is praised “with the Holy Spirit, in the glory of God the Father.” Thus, the hymn succinctly culminates with homage paid to our holy triune God.

After the Gloria, the priest invites the people to pray a prayer known as the Collect. This prayer gathers all the intentions of the people participating in the Mass and concludes what is known as the Introductory Rites of the Mass.