

# The Mass

## The Parts of the Mass – Part 6 – The Responsorial Psalm & 2<sup>nd</sup> Reading

### A. The Responsorial Psalm

After hearing God's word proclaimed in the first reading, we respond next, not with our own human words, but with God's own inspired words of praise and thanksgiving from the book of Psalms. The recitation of the psalms helps to create an atmosphere of prayer conducive for meditation on the reading. Using the psalms in our worship of God is quite natural. Saint Paul exhorted his followers to sing psalms (Colossians 3:16). And the tradition of using psalms for liturgical worship goes back even further.

The book of Psalms represents a collection of 150 sacred hymns used for private devotion and public worship in the Temple liturgy. In the Temple, the verses of the psalms would be sung by two alternating groups with a common refrain that was sung before and after the psalm itself. We see some indications of this in the book of psalms itself.

This back and forth or "antiphonal" movement is found not only in the Responsorial Psalms, but throughout the Mass: "The Lord be with you...And with your spirit." "The word of the Lord...Thanks be to God." "Lift up your hearts...We lift them up to the Lord." It is also found throughout the Bible.

Moses, in the covenant ceremony on Sinai, proclaims the words of the Lord to the people, and they all answer liturgically, "in one voice," saying, "All that the Lord has spoken we will do" (Exodus 19:9). When Ezra read the book of the law to the people, he blessed the Lord and the people responded "Amen, Amen" (Nehemiah 8:6). When John of Patmos, in the book of Revelation, has a vision of the liturgy in heaven, he sees thousands of angels praising the Lord by saying, "Worthy is the Lamb who was slain, to receive power and wealth and wisdom and might and honor and glory and blessing!" Then, all the creatures reply, "To him who sits upon the throne and to the Lamb be blessing and honor and glory and might forever and ever!" And the angelic four living creatures answer back, "Amen" (Revelation 5:11-14).

Clearly, the liturgical dialogue in the Mass follows a biblical model for worship, even more, a heavenly model for worship. It is no wonder, therefore, that the early Christians picked up on this pattern and incorporated it into their worship of God. The early Church writers Hippolytus and Tertullian offer evidence that as early as

the third century, psalms were being recited at Mass with cantors singing the psalms and the people giving a response, often times repeating the first line of the psalms. This was a practice that may even reflect the way the psalms were used in ancient Israelite worship. All of this serves as the basis of our Responsorial Psalm today.

#### B. The Second Reading

The second reading comes from the New Testament: one of the epistles, the Acts of the Apostles, or the book of Revelation. Though often selected independently of the first reading and the Gospel, these New Testament writings reflect on the mystery of Jesus Christ and his saving work and the meaning it has for our lives. They also draw out the practical applications of our life in Christ and exhort us ever more to “put on Christ” and turn away from sin.