

THE GATHERING:

In the year 304 AD in North Africa Saint Victoria was arrested and martyred for her faith along with forty-five other parishioners. One of those martyred along side her was Emeritus who, when arrested at the house gathering, said in his defence: “*quoniam sine dominico non possumus*” -*without the day of the Lord we cannot live*. It is correct to assume that the Mass begins when those gathered together in church stand and sing the entrance hymn but in one sense the Mass begins before this moment with an invitation that demands a response. The invitation comes from the Lord who said, “Do this in memory of me”.

What is our response to such an invitation?

Cardinal Mahony of Los Angeles described a utopian response in a pastoral letter written in 1997.

“In houses and apartments all through the neighbourhood, the true entrance procession of this Mass has been in full swing, sometimes calm, sometimes hectic. Sunday clothes are being put on. Many families are finishing breakfast, conscious of the one-hour fast...Some households make a conscious effort to keep the morning quiet: no radio or television, and the Sunday papers wait until later in the day. In a surprisingly large number of households.., the Sunday Scriptures have already been read together on Friday or Saturday evening... So this is the entrance procession, coming from all directions, made up of all ages, several races, a variety of economic circumstances and political outlooks...but they are all in a great procession, the Church assembling in the house of the Church.”

This procession is a witness to the world that as followers of Jesus „without the day of the Lord we cannot live.” It is also a reminder to us that we are a pilgrim people. Timothy Radcliffe in his book, *Why Go To Church*, writes: “All our processions — in, around and out of church — are signs that we are a pilgrim people, on our way to the Kingdom.” (Pg. 101) “We drag ourselves out of bed and leave our houses because they are not our final homes. And if we have to drive farther because some dreadful bishop has closed our local church, then we console ourselves that the longer journey is a better sign of our lifelong pilgrimage to happiness than if we just had to nip around the corner”. (Pg.11).

THE ENTRANCE ANTIPHON or HYMN

The entrance hymn marks the opening act of the celebration of the Mass but we should not simply regard it as something we do to accompany the formal procession of the priest and ministers to the sanctuary. The entrance hymn does much more than that. It is intended to help the gathered assembly to become one in mind and heart as we begin our worship together. Because our lives take us off in all directions it is essential

that when we gather again in the Lord we do so not as disparate individuals but as one body, one family.

This does not mean that when we gather we forget our own individual cares and distractions rather we bring them to the one who shows us how to bear them. The disciples on the road to Emmaus were downcast when the Lord, as stranger, appeared to accompany them along they way. But by this meeting their grief turns to hope as their hearts burn within them. When we gather for Mass we too are often carrying heavy burdens of one kind or another. We are not meant to leave these at the door of the church only to collect them on the way out. We carry them with us like the disciples on the Emmaus road. We carry them to the Lord just as surely as the four men carried a stretcher and stripped a roof in order to present a paralytic to the Lord at a gathering in Capernaum at which the Lord himself was preaching the word to them. (Mark 2: 1-12)

What are our concerns? Who are the people we carry in our hearts to our gathering, to the Mass - maybe a child who has left the practice of the faith, maybe a sick relative or a friend who cannot come to Mass anymore? Maybe lost dreams or broken promises, maybe the grief of loss and death? Just as the Lord, seeing their faith, said to the paralytic: „your sins are forgiven,” so also, seeing our faith, the Lord will transform us and all that which we carry to him in faith. And our hearts will burn within us once more as we turn again to the world in joy, giving witness as the psalm rightly says: „They who go out full of tears, carrying seed for the sowing, shall come back full of song, carrying their sheaves” (Ps 126). The joining of our voices then in song is a sign of that faith, a sign of our unity which is ours through Baptism while at the same time this common song strengthens that unity, and is a sign of the joy we share in the Lord. The text of this opening song also serves to prepare us for the mystery we are about to celebrate and for the season or feast of the day. (General Instruction of the Roman Missal, no. 47).

Pause for thought...

How might we better prepare each week for Sunday Mass?

- Perhaps reading and reflecting on the Sunday scriptures sometime during the week.
- Having a time of quiet before Mass on Sunday morning TV, Radio and Newspapers left until later in the day.
- Making time to consider what everyday concerns we bring with us to offer in prayer.
- Being more conscious of the people we carry with us in our hearts so that they too can be part of the Eucharistic celebration?