

Entrance Song and Procession and Veneration of the Altar

Once the people have gathered, the priests and the ministers dressed in their sacred vestments go in procession to the altar accompanied by song. The procession and song is a sign of the self identity of both ministers and people—a visual expression of the people becoming a liturgical community coming together gathered in response to God's invitation.

Historically, some type of formal entry into the basilica already existed by the fourth century. By the early eighth century it was part of the papal Mass. Following a period of later disuse, it has been restored today to the present form.

The majority of Western rites have traditionally been accompanied by song, sung either by professionals or later, by the whole assembly. The entrance song creates an atmosphere of celebration and helps put the assembly in the proper frame of mind to listen to the word of God. During the most important liturgical seasons of the year: Easter, Lent, Christmas and Advent, it is preferable that the songs used for the procession be seasonal in nature.

In ancient times the kiss as a sign of greeting was used to show reverence for temples and images of gods. Likewise, the table was honored before the family meal when the meal was considered sacred. By the fourth century, Christians had adopted this sign of honor, since the altar was "the table of the Lord". Until the thirteenth century the kiss was given three times during the Mass: at the beginning, during the Eucharistic Prayers and before the dismissal. Today the altar is venerated with a kiss only at the beginning and end of the Mass.

When they reach the sanctuary, the priest, the deacon and the ministers reverence the altar with a profound bow. As an expression of veneration, the priest and the deacon then kiss the altar. As the occasion suggests, the priest also incenses the cross and the altar.