

LITURGICAL DEVELOPMENT OF THE MASS—II

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So soon as the Church emerged from the Catacombs the ritual of the Mass became quite elaborate. A procession always preceded the divine Sacrifice. Music has always been a part of processions. The only hymn book of the early Church was the book of psalms. Since the *Introit* is found in the earliest antiphonaries, it may be presumed that the psalm sung by the entering procession was one of the earliest developments of the Mass. Early writers, however, not considering it an integral part of the Mass (which began at the altar) make no mention of it. The *Liber Pontificalis* ascribes the introit psalm to Pope Celestine I (422-432). "He made many rules and decreed that the 150th psalm of David should be sung before the sacrifice by two choirs, which was not done previously."¹ Medieval authors repeat this and explain that Gregory I afterwards added the antiphon in the Roman rite. The two verses of the *Doxology* seem to have been added at Rome during the pontificate of Pope Damasus I (366-384). The short verses before and after the psalm, which we now call the *Antiphon*, came from the eastern Antiochene rite. St. Ambrose introduced into the rite at Milan the Antiochene mode of singing the psalm, whence it was adopted by Gregory. Originally the antiphon was repeated after each verse. One person sang a verse of the psalm, and the people repeated the antiphon after each verse. Gradually the antiphon was reduced to the beginning and end of the psalm. Finally the *Introit* was sung in this way—the antiphon, psalm, *Doxology*, and the antiphon repeated. Soon however, an entire psalm was found to be too long. By the eleventh century the introit psalm was curtailed to its present state—one verse only.

The *Introit* is the first of the variable parts of the Mass, changing in accordance with the Sunday or the feast. The *Gregorian Sacramentary* (590-604) begins with this rubric: "First of all for

¹Gihl, *The Sacrifice of the Mass*, p. 383, note 1.

the introit, each antiphon will be determined for the time, whether a feast or ferial.”² The psalm that follows is understood. The *Gregorian Antiphonary*, as we know it, contains practically all the *Propria* that we use in the older feasts. Many of the chants contained in this antiphonary may antedate the time of Gregory, and of course a great number of new Introits have been added to the liturgy since his time.

While the procession moved up the church chanting the Introit, the celebrant prepared himself for the sacrifice he was about to offer by saying some prayers. These prayers he now says at the foot of the altar, but for a long time they were simply his own private preparation. No special prayers were appointed or prescribed. The fixed form now in use is the latest addition to the Mass. There is no mention of any such prayers until the eleventh century, and during the Middle Ages there was great variety in their use. The Missal of Paul III (1550) ordered that the priest should recite Psalm 42 aloud or in silence before he approached the altar. It was the Missal of Pius V (1570) that finally fixed the celebrant's preparatory prayers in the form that we have them today.

The word *collecta* is a late Latin form for *collectio*. There is no doubt as to the original use of the word. The meeting of the clergy and the people was known in ancient time as a *collectio*—an assembly. When there was a station at a certain church, the people and clergy first met at another church and then went in procession to the appointed church where the Mass was to be celebrated. Their first meeting was called the *collectio*. Before the procession began a prayer was said; and the same prayer repeated at the end of the procession. It is this prayer that we now know as the *Collect*. The *Leonine Sacramentary* (440-461) makes mention of four special prayers—the Collect, Secret, Postcommunion, and the Prayer for the people. Any doubt that remains as to the use of the Collect is cleared up by the *Gregorian Sacramentary*.

In the beginning only one Collect was said at each Mass. The multiplication of these prayers, to commemorate other feasts, or, as it seems originally, to say many prayers, began north of the Alps in the Gallican rite. The custom reached Rome about the twelfth century. In the *Leonine Sacramentary* are contained the oldest collects, most of which are still found in the Missal.

The reading of the sacred books has always been the principal

² Fortescue, *The Mass—A Study of the Roman Liturgy*, p. 218.

part of the liturgy of the catechumens since Apostolic times. It is inherited from the Synagogue, and is used in every rite in Christendom. Justin Martyr, important among the early liturgists, begins his account with the lessons; allusions to them may also be found in the Fathers and Apologists of the third century. During the first three centuries not only the Bible but letters of bishops were read. At first neither the number of lessons nor the amount read were fixed. It was the celebrant's duty to give a sign when enough had been read, and thus to determine the length of the lesson.

With the gradual crystallizing of the whole service into a set form came the fixing of the lessons. As the portions to be read were determined, so also were the number of lessons. In the early centuries of Christianity there was great variety as to the number of lessons read. The Apostolic Constitutions give five: "the reading of the Law, and the Prophets, the Epistles, the Acts and the Gospels." Other rites have several lessons before the Gospel. In the early stages of development, the Roman rite had three such lessons—the Prophecy, Epistle and Gospel. Since the sixth century there have been usually two, the prophetic lesson having been dropped; although we have on the Ember Days and in Lent several added lessons. The two short chants that we commonly call the Gradual remain as evidence of the Prophecy which it followed. Hence the Epistle is on most days our one surviving scriptural lesson before the Gospel. It is usually spoken of as the Epistle, although it is often taken from another part of the Bible.

The Introit, Offertory and Communion were merely added to fill up the time while some ceremony was being performed, such as the procession to the altar or the offering of gifts by the people. The psalms sung between the lessons were not introduced for any such reason. These psalms have always been considered an integral part of the liturgy; the celebrant and his attendants did nothing but listen to them. We have evidence of this from the earliest ages. This custom was derived from the Synagogue service, which had alternate lessons and psalms. Tertullian makes mention of the psalms sung between the lessons; and St. Augustine in one of his sermons says: "We have heard first the lesson from the Apostle . . . then we sang a psalm . . . after that the lesson of the Gospel showed us the ten lepers healed."³ At that time it seems that one psalm was sung after each lesson. They were sung in the East and West as a

³ *Sermo* clxxvi, 1. (*P. L.* xxxviii, 950).

responsory psalm, a lector singing each verse and the people echoing the final cadences. At Rome a deacon sang the psalm, until in 595 Gregory suppressed a custom which had led deacons to think more of their voices than of weightier things. But the psalm after the lesson always remained a solo with a chorus. In the first Roman Ordo it is called *Responsum*, in the third Roman Ordo *Responsorium*, while in the Gregorian Sacramentary it is called *Graduale*.

The entire chant between the Epistle and the Gospel is usually called the Gradual. It consists, however, of two separate parts, of which the first alone is the *graduale*. The second part is the *Alleluia*, replaced from Septuagesima to Easter by the *Tract*. This Alleluia is also inherited from the Synagogue. It occurs in many liturgies. "In the Byzantine rite it is sung three times at the end of the Cherubic hymn at the Great Entrance, and in the Gallican rite it came at the same place."⁴ Its first use in the Roman rite was at Easter. It seems that the Romans found in the Alleluia an ejaculation suitable to the joyous spirit of Easter. However, in the East no such idea is found, for there it is sung the whole year round, even at funerals. Before the time of Gregory I it had been sung throughout the Paschal season. Gregory extended the use of the Alleluia beyond the Easter period; and in defending the Roman Church from the charge of imitating Constantinople, he says that the Alleluia was brought to Rome from Jerusalem by St. Jerome in the time of Pope Damasus, and that Rome does not sing it as the Byzantines do. From this it is apparent that the Alleluia was first used at Rome in the fourth century, where it was sung twice at each service. The second time that it was sung, the final 'a' was drawn out in long neums by the music. This musical phrase is of great moment. Medieval authors call it the *iubilus*, *iubilatio* or *cantilena*. To them it means much more than a place where the neums happen to be longer than usual. They see in it an inarticulate expression of joy, by which the mind is carried up to the unspeakable bliss of the saints. Under Gregory the Great the versicle was added to the Alleluia. The words of this verse were "destined to provide subordination and support to the exuberance of the melismas and render them comprehensible."⁵ Thus it is natural to explain the verse as a text fitted to part of the long *iubilus*. This insertion of a text to the neums is called farcing. Thus the Alleluia

⁴ Fortescue, *op. cit.*, p. 268.

⁵ Johnner, O.S.B. *A New School of Gregorian Chant*, p. 127.

of today consists in the Alleluia sung twice, the alleluia verse, and the Alleluia repeated.

During certain seasons of the year, the joyful alleluia chant after the gradual is silent, and in its place a chant of more somber character is supplied. This is the second psalm, originally sung after the second lesson, but which is now displaced (except during Lent and other fast days) by the Alleluia. The first Roman Ordo gives the whole arrangement, and our present practice remains the same. The Gregorian Antiphonary has the Tracts instead of the Alleluias from Septuagesima until Easter.

The *Tract* is so called because of the manner in which it was sung. The characteristic manner of singing this psalm consisted in this that all the verses were sung continuously by one singer, that is, without the choir interrupting him by responding. Later writers explain the word tract incorrectly as meaning the slow and mournful way in which it was sung. Generally the tract consisted in an indefinite number of verses from the various psalms or other books of the Bible.

The *Sequence* began as a farcing of the long neum at the end of the Alleluia, as did the Alleluia verse. The first sequences are attributed to Notker the Stammerer (d. 912) of St. Gall in Switzerland. Adam of St. Victor (d. 1192) brought the composition of sequences to perfection as regards form and poetic expression. During the Middle Ages sequences were written prolifically. They were admitted later and less willingly into Italy. Italian missals of this period have as a rule only three or four sequences. In Spain the Mozarabic rite never admitted this development. But north of the Alps and the Pyrenees there was such a plethora of sequences that every local medieval rite had numbers of them—one for almost every Mass. The great majority of these sequences had little or no value either as poetry or devotional works. They lengthened the Mass unduly. The reform of the missal under Pius V swept away the vast number of inferior sequences, retaining the very best—just five: the *Victimae Paschali* (for Easter), the *Veni Sancte Spiritus* (for Pentecost), the *Stabat Mater Dolorosa* (for the feast of the Seven Dolors), the *Dies Irae* (of the Requiem Mass) and the *Lauda Sion* (for Corpus Christi).

The reading of the Gospel has always been the last lesson. In some places of the West, the Gospel for a time was considered a part of the mass of the faithful, so that the catechumens were expelled

before it was read. The Synods of Orange (441) and Valencia (524) forbade this, and ordered that the catechumens should remain until after the Gospel. On the other hand, in all Eastern rites the catechumens were dismissed after the Gospel. The Gospel was read at first by a lector, but gradually the sense of its unique importance led to the idea that a higher minister should read it. St. Jerome speaks of the deacon as the reader of the Gospel; so also does the Apostolic Constitutions. From the fifth century, this privilege was signified by handing the deacon the book of the Gospels at his ordination.