



## *Archdiocese of New York + 2011*

### ***GREETINGS AND BEGINNINGS***

**The Importance of Beginnings:** *Let us begin as we intend to go on.* When the community of the baptized comes together to worship, those present come from varying places and activities; they come in a variety of states of mind, from pre-occupied or anxious to expectant and joyful. There is a need at this moment of beginning to STOP and to recall what it is that we are about to do so that we may do it well.

**How Do We Begin?** The *General Instruction of the Roman Missal* suggests that before Mass begins, quiet and silence in the body of the church, as well as in the sacristy, will help those about to enter into this great Mystery to be better prepared for what will follow. (n.45) As we meet outside we greet one another; inside, we reflect and greet the Lord. But silence alone is not enough. Those who gather come together as the assembled people of God to join together in worship, to hear God's word and to pray together under the leadership of the priest-celebrant. Our celebration of Mass begins with the Entrance chant or song which accompanies the procession of the priest, deacon and other ministers to the altar. As the opening act of the celebration, it is intended to help those present to become one in mind and heart as they begin their worship together, to put aside their own individual cares and distractions and to enter fully into prayer and praise of the gathered assembly. St. Paul instructs the Colossians that, as they await the Lord's coming they should, together, sing psalms and hymns and spiritual songs. The joining of our voices in song is a sign of the unity that is ours by our common Baptism while at the same time this common song strengthens that unity and is a sign of the joy we share in the Lord. This opening music also serves to prepare us for the mystery we are about to celebrate and for the Season or Feast of the day.

**The Greeting of the Altar:** When the priest and deacon reach the front of the church, they greet the altar, first with a bow and then with a kiss. At first this may seem strange, but it is done for good reason. If any of you has ever been to the dedication of a church you have experienced the solemn ritual by which the altar is dedicated. It is sprinkled with holy water, anointed by the bishop, then incensed and surrounded with lighted candles. These rites are carried out to set the altar apart for its only role, to serve as the place on which the Eucharistic rituals of the Last Supper, the Paschal Sacrifice of Christ will take place. The altar is anointed to conform it to Christ whose name means "the anointed one" and, for this reason, is given the special veneration of a bow whenever one passes it and of the ritual kiss or embrace by the ordained ministers at the beginning and end of Mass. In celebrations of special solemnity the altar, and the cross which represents the sacrifice of Christ, are incensed by the priest.

**The Greeting of the People:** When the priest reaches his chair he begins the celebration with the Sign of the Cross, in the name of the Father, and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit at whose invitation and in whose honor we gather. He then greets the people with one of several options drawn from Scripture and the people respond to his Greeting. This Greeting and the response by the people is not a mere banal tradition. It signifies, manifests the mystery of the Church ordained ministers, lay ministers and faithful gathered together for the worship of God. Finally, after the greeting of the people, there may be a brief introduction to the Mass of the day by the priest, the deacon, or a lay minister