



Episode 5: Processions

SUMMARY

A procession is an assembly on the move. It symbolizes, in every instance, our pilgrimage through this world to our true homeland; we are citizens of heaven.

There is a difference between “gathering” and “assembly.” A gathering can be any group. An assembly, on the other hand, is a group called together, formed into a body, united in their purpose and in their destination.

There are four processions in the Mass: the Entrance, Gospel, Offertory and Communion processions. They symbolize the constant journey deeper and deeper into the mystery of God.

Even when there is no visible procession, there are signs that represent our movement toward God: the church door with its threshold and aisle (especially when its design distinguishes it from the rest of the floor) and the entrance to the sanctuary (marked with a rail, or gate, or steps). These are all sacramental signs of procession.

Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy

The purpose of the sacraments is to sanctify men, to build up the body of Christ, and, finally, to give worship to God; because they are signs they also instruct. [...]

It is therefore of the highest importance that the faithful should easily understand the sacramental signs, and should frequent with great eagerness those sacraments which were instituted to nourish the Christian life. (n°. 59)

Jean Hani

“...Romano Guardini writes that modern man needs to relearn the profound importance of gestures. The sign of the cross made with blessed water is more often than not a purely mechanical gesture. Perhaps an even more mechanical act is to ‘enter the church’. And yet how much we miss, through lack of attention, in the apparently insignificant acts of ‘crossing the threshold’ and ‘going through the door’, for what is involved is the mystery of ‘passage’, when the existence in traditional societies of all manner of ‘rites of passage’, and especially It is of the essence of the Church that she be both human and divine, visible and yet invisibly

equipped, eager to act and yet intent on rites of hospitality.” ...“we pass from one world to another.”

IN THE TRADITION

The LORD said to Abram: Go forth from your land, your relatives, and from your father’s house to a land that I will show you.

Genesis 12:1

Enter his gates with thanksgiving, his courts with praise. Give thanks to him, bless his name.

Psalms 100:4

“[The city] which is heavenly and is a pilgrim on the earth does not make false gods, but is herself made by the true God of whom she herself must be the true sacrifice. Yet both [cities] alike either enjoy temporal good things, or are afflicted with temporal evils, but with diverse faith, diverse hope, and diverse love, until they must be separated by the last judgment, and each must receive her own end, of which there is no end.”

The City of God, Book XVIII, St. Augustine

“[Christians] live each in his native land but as though they were not really at home there [as sojourners]. They share in all duties as citizens and suffer all hardships as strangers. Every foreign country is a fatherland to them, and every fatherland a foreign land ... They dwell on earth but they are citizens of heaven”

Letter to Diognetus

THE TEACHING OF THE CHURCH

✠ “Besides sacramental liturgy and sacramentals, catechesis must take into account the forms of piety and popular devotions among the faithful. The religious sense of the Christian people has always found expression in various

forms of piety surrounding the Church's sacramental life, such as the veneration of relics, visits to sanctuaries, pilgrimages, processions, the stations of the cross, religious dances, the rosary, medals, etc.”

Catechism of the Catholic Church (CCC), n°. 1674

IN THE PRAYER OF THE CHURCH

Ascension of the Lord, Vigil

May the gifts we have received from your altar,
Lord,

kindle in our hearts a longing for the heavenly
homeland

and cause us to press forward,
following in the Savior’s footsteps,
to the place where for our sake he entered
before us.

Who lives and reigns for ever and ever.

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

1. Processions are perennial signs of our journey to heaven. What other signs are reminders that we are made for heaven?
2. Christians, like ancient Israel, journey not as individuals, but as a people. In the context of Exodus 15-20, what other similarities characterize this pilgrimage?

FOR FURTHER READING

Jean Hani, *The Symbolism of the Christian Temple*, (San Rafael, CA: Perennis, 2007).

Denis McNamara, *How to Read Churches: A Crash Course in Ecclesiastical Architecture*, (New York: Rizzoli, 2011).