



The Concluding Rite

The Concluding Rites

Endings are very important. When we watch a movie or see a play or attend a concert, we hope to leave with a sense of closure, inspired by what we have seen or heard. The ending of the Catholic Mass is no less important. In fact, the ending of the liturgy is *so* important that it has given us the word we use to describe the entire celebration. The word *Mass* comes from the Latin word *missa* (meaning *sent* or *dismissed*), a word that is spoken by the deacon or priest as the assembly is dismissed: “Ite! Missa est!” (“Go! You are dismissed!”) It is to this ending of the Mass that we now turn our attention as we explore some seemingly small but significant changes in the words that are used to send us forth.

The Roman Missal changes the end of the Mass

The importance of this final act of the Mass cannot be overlooked. It is not a “dismissal” as we might normally think of that word: “Okay, you may go now.” Nor is it a punitive act as when one is “dismissed” (i.e., fired) from a job or when one is “kicked out” of a group. No, this dismissal is very different.

In a real sense, the new Roman Missal changes the tone of the concluding rite. There is an urgency in the words. It is less “you may go now” and more “you *must* go now . . . to proclaim what God has done for us here!” More colloquially, it might be “Go! Scram! What are you still standing here for? Go and take what God has given us here (i.e., the *Eucharist*), and take it out to your workplaces, to your neighborhoods, to your families!”

The Roman Missal Changes Emphasize a Call to Action

Picture the Ascension of Christ as recorded in Acts. Christ assures the apostles, “You are to be my witnesses in Jerusalem . . . yes, even to the ends of the earth.” Then, after he is taken up to heaven, the Apostles stand there, almost gawking, until two angels appear and stir them: “Why do you stand here, looking up at the skies?” (cf. Acts 1:8, 10). Similarly, the new Roman Missal changes the dismissal at Mass to stir us—to *send us out* as Christ’s witnesses!

This will be very obvious in the Roman Missal changes to the English translation of the 3rd edition of the Roman Missal. There will be four options for the deacon or priest to use. One is the simple “*Go in peace*” that is familiar to us. There is also “*Go forth, the Mass is ended.*” Hear how the “Go forth” conveys much of that sense of *being sent*.

This sense is also obvious in the two remaining options, included at the behest of Pope Benedict XVI. The first of these is “*Go and announce the Gospel of the Lord.*” Do you hear it? It cannot be more explicit! We are sent out on *mission*—to announce the Gospel, to be Christ’s witnesses, to work for the coming kingdom.

The remaining option for the dismissal is just as beautiful: “*Go in peace, glorifying the Lord by your life.*” Through what God has just done for us, and through what God has done to us in this Eucharist, go, and by our lives—by how we live and act and treat others and make decisions—by all of that, give glory to the Lord!

Moving forward with the Roman Missal Changes

Thus, we have come to the end of the Mass and have explored many of the most significant changes that we will experience in the celebration of the Mass when we begin using the new translation of the 3rd Edition of the Roman Missal this Advent 2011. In our next and final article, we will provide some closing thoughts about how we can view this experience as not only a challenge but also an opportunity to delve deeper into the Mystery of the Eucharist that is at the center of our lives.

- Review now all the segments of this series from archived material. Try to see all the changes as part of one whole initiative to help us enter more deeply into the mystery of Christ.
- Share with family or friends what it means to you to respond to the invitation to come to the “supper of the Lamb.”
- What do we miss when we leave Mass early? How does the dismissal rite link the altar with everything else we do all week?