

A QUICK GUIDE TO

# The Mass

After reading this short e-book, it's our hope that you will see the Mass in a new light and appreciate this tremendous gift for what it is - the source and summit of our Catholic faith.



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This guide to the Mass contains a series of articles which the Denver Catholic staff created to help the faithful return to Mass in a deeper way than ever before after an extended absence from it due to the coronavirus pandemic. Our sincere prayer is that in reading through this guide, the Lord will spark in you a renewed love for the Mass and its place as the “source and summit” of our faith.

See you in the pews!



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# Preparing to, once again, partake in the mystery of the Eucharist

For many faithful, the restrictions that have arisen from the coronavirus pandemic have strengthened their desire to receive Jesus in the Eucharist and return once more to the public celebration of the Mass. Yet our preparation to once again receive Jesus more frequently in the Eucharist presents a special time to reflect on the central celebration of the week, the Holy Mass.

For this reason, the *Denver Catholic* has set out to do a series of articles on the main parts of the Mass, of which this is the introduction.

But, in order to dive deeper, we must first ask ourselves what the Mass really is.

The Holy Mass is known as such because the liturgy ends with the sending forth (from the Latin *missio*) of the faithful, so that they may follow God's will in their daily lives. Its common name already tells us that the Liturgical celebration of the Eucharist also has to do with everything outside of "church" and must penetrate all areas of our life. But what about this celebration makes it so important and capable of reaching all the areas of our lives: joys and sufferings, rest and work, oneself and one's family?

It is because Jesus makes himself present. And not only that, for, as we know, he desires to make himself

“*The Eucharist is the center of the Mass and the summit of our faith. But, in order to reach the summit, we must make our way to the top of the mountain.*”

one with us during this celebration. It is the way he chose to do it. It's true that he can make himself present anywhere at any time, but he still chose a specific way by which to accomplish the mystery of salvation.

Abbot Jeremy Driscoll offers deep insights regarding this matter in his book *What Happens at Mass*. He describes the repetition and "sense of performance" we find in the Mass as a sort of "serious play," in which we know that if we follow the movements and words in a special way, "something great and unexpected can break through." Our integration into the form of the liturgy, with all its movements and prayers, takes us out of ourselves, lets God act and gives us a way to respond. We don't have to scramble to find a way to respond on the spot.



*The liturgy is the place in which God decided to accomplish the mystery of salvation in our lives and in the whole world. Let us remember that when we are, once again, able to partake in the great mystery.”*

And all of it is centered around encounter, around love. Jesus himself chooses to encounter us in this way, not as a concept or an idea, but as a person, in his Body and Blood. Abbot Driscoll adds: “Every true relationship needs to be experienced. Mass is the foundational experience of our relationship with God through Jesus, experienced and celebrated in all its fullness. This experience renders possible all other experiences. That is, it makes possible for us to love others as we have been loved by God.”

It is a mystery indeed — but not with the connotation we often give that word today. “Mystery” is often referred to as something almost impossible to understand or something that must be pieced together and resolved. In contrast, based on St. Paul’s writings, Abbot Driscoll loosely describes this concept as “a concrete something that when you bump into it, it puts you in contact with the divine.”

Thus, when we say the “mystery of the Eucharist,” it doesn’t mean that we can’t understand it, but that it is something in which God is hidden. The liturgy of the Eucharist, however, was and is also called “the mysteries,” in plural. The priest himself says in the beginning of the liturgy, “let us acknowledge our sins, and so prepare ourselves to celebrate the sacred mysteries.” That is because all the gestures and words in the Mass are also mysteries in which God is hidden.

The Eucharist, however, is unique — it’s a sacrament. And although “sacrament” is deeply related to “mystery,” it is not as extensive. It likewise denotes something that puts us in contact with God, but through an act or ritual to make something sacred, Abbot Driscoll explains. The Body and Blood of Jesus is a sacrament in which “by means of bread and wine we come into contact with something that now would otherwise be beyond reach;

namely, the risen and glorified Body of Christ, no longer defined to space and time. So, by means of a sacrament we come into contact in space and time with something that transcends space and time.”

This sacrament is the center of the Mass and the summit of our faith. But, in order to reach the summit, we must make our way to the top of the mountain. All the gestures and words of the Mass help us do that. Yet, in a similar manner, our preparation for the Eucharist does not start the moment we step into the church, but in our daily lives: through our work, joys, sufferings, daily prayer...

Even then, the preparation of the Mass began way before that, as Abbot Driscoll says: “Actually we could say that Mass begins with the creation of the world. God intended this kind of encounter with his creatures from the start.”

So, every time you enter the church for the Sunday celebration, remember: “The Mass prepared from the beginning of the world is about to begin.” The whole Church is gathered, in heaven and earth — and in it, the whole creation and the desires of every human heart.

Abbot Driscoll writes, “The meaning of the whole creation and the whole human history is contained here in ritual form and in the people who enact the ritual. This action will cause the Church to be: to do Eucharist is to be Church. To be Church, to be assembled into one, is what God intends for the world.”

The liturgy is the place in which God decided to accomplish the mystery of salvation in our lives and in the whole world. Let us remember that when we are, once again, able to partake in the great mystery. †



**BY VLADIMIR MAURICIO-PEREZ**

*Managing Editor of  
El Pueblo Católico*



# The Introductory Rites: An invitation to prepare for the Holy Mass

The pews of our churches are starting to fill up once again. After a somber Lent without Masses, the doors of churches are opening back up for the faithful to come and participate in the Sacred Liturgy.

Prior to the COVID-19 pandemic and the closure of our parishes, Mass was likely a part of our weekly routine. Every weekend, we would gather at the foot of the altar as one body in Christ, offering our prayers and receiving the fullness of Christ in the Eucharist. This routine of attending Mass each week is a good and beautiful part of the Christian faith — “the source and summit,” as it were.

However, the danger of routines is that they can begin to lose their staying power and meaning over time. How many of us attend Mass each week simply because we have to and not because we actually want to experience it in its fullness? Have we lost touch with the richness of the liturgy and how every piece of it is meant to draw us ever closer to He who laid down his life in love for us? If you answered yes to either of these questions, then the reopening of Masses presents an opportunity to enter into it deeper than ever before.

The Roman Missal divides the Mass into four main parts. Let’s take a look at some of the rich meanings and symbolisms of the Introductory Rites and how our participation in the Mass begins even before the bell rings.

## HOLY WATER DIP

From the moment we set foot inside our parishes, Christ is inviting us to a profound and intimate communion with him in the Mass. As we enter the sanctuary of our parish, it’s instinctual to dip our fingers in

the Holy Water font and bless ourselves with the Sign of the Cross. Have you stopped to consider why we do this?

The obvious answer is it serves as a reminder of our own baptism, which is true. As scripture shows us time and time again, water is an important symbol in the life of the Church. *The Catechism of the Catholic Church* states: “The symbolism of water signifies the Holy Spirit’s action in Baptism, since after the invocation of the Holy Spirit it becomes the efficacious sacramental sign of new birth: just as the gestation of our first birth took place in water, so the water of Baptism truly signifies that our birth into the divine life is given to us in the Holy Spirit. As ‘by one Spirit we were all baptized,’ so we are also ‘made to drink of one Spirit.’ Thus the Spirit is also personally the living water welling up from Christ crucified as its source and welling up in us to eternal life” (CCC 694).

But there’s an even deeper meaning to the blessing with Holy Water that is found when looking back at the early Church. Before entering a sacred space, it was common practice for worshippers to “cleanse” themselves with water. While this served a functional purpose of removing dirt physically from one’s body, it also symbolized the removal of the spiritual grime that builds up on the soul. As St. Clement of Alexandria once wrote: “The best bath, then, is what rubs off the pollution of the soul, and is spiritual. Of which prophecy speaks expressly: ‘The Lord will wash away the filth of the sons and daughters of Israel, and will purge the blood from the midst of them.’”

With this ritual cleansing, we are now ready to enter into the sacred feast that awaits.

## GENUFLECTION + SILENCE

As we make our way to our seat in the pew, the church is silent. Before we sit, again, it is instinctual to genuflect, or kneel, towards the tabernacle in a gesture of reverence for Christ. Historically, the act of genuflection was reserved for rulers and kings as a sign of submission and respect. In the same way, we Catholics genuflect before the true “king of kings” when we enter the church to honor he who is present in the Blessed Sacrament.

The silence of the Church before Mass begins should be a chance for us to simply dwell with the Lord. In the silence, we can listen more intently for the Lord’s voice and what he might be asking us to offer up in the sacrifice of the Mass. It is an opportunity to quiet our hearts, take captive any wandering thoughts, still our worries and anxieties, and just simply exist in the presence of the Most Holy.

## ENTRANCE PROCESSION

The bell rings. Everybody stands. The music begins and a procession enters the church, signifying the beginning of Mass. In a typical Sunday Mass, the procession tends to follow this general order: Altar servers holding the processional Cross (Crucifix), altar servers holding candles, the deacon holding the Gospel, followed by the priest. While this order may seem random, it’s by design.

The processional Cross leads the procession, proclaiming the crucified Christ as the reason for gathering. The candles, sometimes made of beeswax and wicks aflame, signify Christ as the light of the world; the wax and flame also symbolize the dual nature of Christ’s existence as both human and divine. The deacon carrying the Gospels represents both the Words of Christ and the Word made flesh in Christ. Lastly, Christ himself is represented in the priest, who acts in the person of Christ as he celebrates the Sacred Liturgy.

As the procession makes its way through the Body of Christ in the gathered faithful and reaches the altar, they stop to bow. Then, the deacon and priest both kiss the altar as an expression of veneration for the holy sacrifice that is about to take place there. The altar itself represents Christ, “the stone that the builders rejected that becomes the Cornerstone” (Psalm 118). If incense is used, it is meant to symbolize the prayers and plights of all the faithful gathered rising up like smoke to our Father in Heaven (Psalm 141:2 and Rev 8:4).



Photo by Daniel Petty/Denver Catholic

## SIGN OF THE CROSS

Every Mass begins the same way: the priest says the words, “In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit...,” and we mark ourselves with the Sign of the Cross. The Sign of the Cross is a way to acknowledge our reason for being at Mass in the first place: to worship and give thanks to the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit. More importantly though, it is a mark of our belonging to the Lord.

The Sign of the Cross dates back to the first century of Christianity. Marking ourselves with the Sign of the Cross at the start of Mass is also a way to remind ourselves that the Mass is first and foremost a prayer. In a very real and beautiful way, in marking ourselves, we are uniting our prayers with those of the early Christians as well as the millions of other Christians around the world who are celebrating Mass at exactly the same time.

Following the sign, the priest echoes the words of St. Paul, written in the second book of Corinthians: “The grace of Our Lord Jesus Christ, and the Love of God, and the Communion of the Holy Spirit be with you all.” The most common greeting is “The Lord be with you.” As we respond with the words, “And with your spirit,” we recognize the gift of the spirit the priest received at his ordination.

## PENITENTIAL ACT

It is a critical tenet of the Christian faith to acknowledge one’s own sinfulness and imperfection. That’s precisely why Christ came; to reconcile humanity with the God who created them. At Mass, this acknowledgment comes most predominantly during the Penitential Act. As the priest implores us to “call to mind our sins so as to prepare to celebrate [the] sacred mysteries,” we are asked to have a penitential disposition and a purified heart before we engage in the Sacred Liturgy.

The priest then leads the congregation in a brief declaration, called the *Confiteor* in Latin, as he begins, “I confess, to almighty God, and to you my brothers and sisters, that I have greatly sinned...” In echoing these words, the faithful are declaring their own sinfulness and asking for God’s mercy. In striking our chests three times as we say the words, “through my fault, through my fault, through my most grievous fault,” we imitate an ancient symbol of contrition, described in Sacred Scripture as the “beating of the breast” on several occasions.

Following this declaration, the faithful sometimes recite the *Kyrie Eleison*, which is Greek for “Lord, have mercy.” Rather than begging for God’s mercy, these words should be approached as a reverent prayer to the Lord in thanksgiving for his mercy and grace. Though we don’t deserve it, we acknowledge his endless love for us as we respond to the words of the priest or deacon, “Lord, have mercy. Christ, have mercy.” Through the Penitential Act, we are thus able to partake of the Eucharistic celebration with a pure heart; it should be noted, however, that if one is knowingly in a state of mortal sin

at Mass, the sacrament of reconciliation is necessary in order to receive the Eucharist.

## GLORIA

After the *Kyrie Eleison*, the faithful lift their voices in the Gloria. The Gloria is one of the oldest and most ancient parts of the liturgy, dating back to the 100s. The opening words of the Gloria, “Glory to God in the highest, and on earth, peace to people of good will...” echo the words of the angels to the shepherds on the night Jesus was born.

In a very real way, by singing the Gloria, we are uniting our voices with that of the angels of heaven in a triumphant chorus of praise to the Lord. It is a chorus



that transcends the ages and bespeaks the spiritual and metaphysical realities that clash with the earthly in the Holy Mass. It is a song that has been, is and will be sung for all eternity.

## COLLECT

Finally, before entering the Liturgy of the Word, the priest leads the congregation in a prayer called the Collect. This prayer is intended to “collect” the prayers of the faithful and unite them with the sacred mysteries that occur during the Mass. As the General Instruction of the Roman Missal states: “The Priest pronounces the prayer usually called the ‘Collect’ and through which the character of the celebration finds expression.”

With our souls now cleansed, our minds now quiet and our hearts now purified and open to the Lord, we are ready to engage in the Holy Mass and receive Jesus in the Eucharist. †



**BY AARON LAMBERT**  
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# The Liturgy of the Word: The Lord speaks to his people

Following the Introductory Rites of the Mass, when the faithful are invited to enter a proper disposition for the Sacred Liturgy, we enter into the first of the two main parts of the Holy Mass: The Liturgy of the Word.

In his book *A Biblical Walk Through the Mass*, Dr. Edward Sri writes of the “two tables” of the Mass: “The Church has often used the image of ‘two tables’ to express the continuity between the two main parts of the Mass: the Liturgy of the Word and the Liturgy of the Eucharist. God’s people are nourished first from the table of Holy Scripture, which is proclaimed in the Liturgy of the Word. Then they are fed with the body of our Lord at the table of the Eucharist.”

In short, the Liturgy of the Word is what adequately prepares our hearts, minds and souls to receive the body, blood, soul and divinity of Christ in the Eucharist. As we turn our focus to the lectern of the church and hear the Word of God proclaimed through his people, we have an opportunity to perk up and lend our ears to listen to the what Lord has to say to each of us.

## THE FIRST READING

“In the readings, the table of God’s Word is spread before the faithful, and the treasures of the Bible are opened to them.” So says the General Instruction of the Roman Missal (57), further using the aforementioned “table” analogy. As we begin the Liturgy of the Word, we have a front row seat at this very table.

The First Reading is usually taken from the Old Testament, the only exception being during the Easter Season, when it is from the Acts of the Apostles. As with every facet of the Catholic Church, there is a purpose for this. The words of the Old Testament help to paint a fuller, more vivid picture of what happens in the New Testament. Jesus Christ is the fulfillment of the divine revelation foretold in the Old Testament, and the First Reading is generally connected to the Gospel Reading in some way, whether it be thematically or a prefigurement of Christ and the Church. The Old Testament is rich with typology, or symbolism, that finds its fulfillment or meaning in the New Testament, and this is why the First Reading is so important. Just as the Lord revealed



himself to the people of Israel, he is revealing himself to us through his Word at Mass.

### THE RESPONSORIAL PSALM

After hearing God's Word in the First Reading, we respond, not with our own words, but with beautiful words of praise and thanksgiving taken from the Book of Psalms. The books of Psalms is a collection of 150 sacred hymns used for both private and public worship in the Old and New Testaments, and the Psalm that's sung (or sometimes recited) during the Mass is thematically linked to the First Reading. While the Responsorial Psalm is usually taken from the Book of Psalms, it occasionally a canticle take from another book of the Bible.

The reason for the Responsorial Psalm is two-fold; first, as the cantor sings the Psalm, the congregation literally responds by singing it back in an act of worship. Secondly, it is intended as a response to the First Reading and helps the faithful to more deeply meditate on the theme of the liturgy. The entire gamut of human emotions is reflected in the Psalms, and instead of mere words, they should be read as prayers that allow us to enter into the mystery of God and his great love for us.

### THE SECOND READING

Following the Responsorial Psalm, the lector further proclaims the Word of God with the Second Reading. The Second Reading comes from the New Testament and, while not always linked directly to the First Reading or the Gospel, it contains rich wisdom of what it means to be a follower of Jesus Christ and his Church. These readings are taken from all the books of the New Testament that aren't the Gospels; the epistles, or letters from St. Paul and other disciples, the Acts of the Apostles and the Book of Revelation. While the Second Reading can be understood independently of the other two readings, it often enriches the lessons to be found in them.

### THE GOSPEL

Now we reach what the General Instruction of the Roman Missal calls the "high point of the Liturgy of the Word": The Gospel reading. The actions that correspond with this part of the Mass indicate its sacredness: the congregation stands and joins in the "alleluia" with the cantor; the deacon or priest holds up the Book of the Gospels and processes in front of the altar to the ambo; following the greeting, "The Lord be with you," and our response, "And with your spirit," we trace the Sign of the Cross on our foreheads, mouths and chests in a symbolic gesture whereby we ask for the grace to keep the Lord's Word ever-present in our minds, on our lips and in our hearts.

We should not think of the Gospel reading as a news report about Jesus Christ or an anecdotal re-telling of what he did while he was on earth; rather, it should be viewed more as a divinely-inspired eyewitness account through which Christ has communicated with his faithful throughout the ages. These are His words, carefully chosen and spoken directly from the tongue of the holy of holies, and inscribed eternally on the pages of the Gospel. At this point of the Mass, we ought to have ears to listen, because what could demand our attention more?

### THE HOMILY

Homily comes from the Greek word for "explanation." From very ancient times, the presiding priest would take time to explain the Scriptures that had been read, as it's seen in St. Justin Martyr's account of the Mass dating to the middle of the first century. The practice of following the reading of Scriptures with a "homily" wasn't something new for the Christians. The Pharisees had a similar practice in their synagogues, and we even know from the Gospels that Jesus himself partook in it (Lk 4:16-30). So, let's listen attentively about how the Scripture readings can be put into practice in our daily lives, and how God wants to tell us something every time his Word is proclaimed.

### THE CREED

In our surrounding culture, we encounter beliefs that are in direct conflict with our faith. Relativism, for example, is very popular: the belief that there is no universal truth, especially regarding matters of morality and religion. In the Creed, we proclaim the opposite. We proclaim that we believe in one God who created the universe, that we are not an accident brought about by chance, that God has a divine plan, that good and evil truly exist and we can know them. The Creed reminds us that we are not mere spectators in the plan of salvation, but instead challenges us to choose what side we will be fighting on.

Therefore, when we say the words "I believe" on Sunday, we do it as an act of faith and trust, placing ourselves, our loved ones and all our lives in God's loving care.

### THE PRAYER OF THE FAITHFUL

The Liturgy of the Word concludes with a prayer for all the faithful of the community and around the world, as well as for all men — also a very early practice mentioned by St. Justin Martyr. St. Paul already encouraged his communities to pray for kings and governors (1 Tim 2:1-4) and his ministry and needs (2 Cor 1:11). During this time, we also lift up the souls of the faithful departed and any other intentions in our hearts. †

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BY DENVER  
CATHOLIC STAFF

# ‘Behold, the Lamb of God’: Liturgy of the Eucharist

After hearing God’s word triumphantly proclaimed in the “first table” of the Mass, the Liturgy of the Word, we enter into the “second table” of the Mass, and consequently the high point of the entire Mass, the Liturgy of the Eucharist. This is where the sacrifice of Christ on the cross is once again made present through the Eucharist. Jesus does not physically die each time during Mass, but we are taken to that crucial moment in history, to his death and resurrection. At this moment, acting in the person of Christ, the priest consecrates the bread and wine, and these truly become the Body and Blood of Christ that we later receive in the communion.

## PREPARATION OF THE GIFTS

Here begins what is normally called “The Offertory,” in which the bread and wine are carried in procession to the altar. This symbolizes the offer of oneself and of our efforts of the week to God, or, as it is said in the Mass, “Fruit of the earth/fruit of the vine and human work”. At this time, the passing of the collection basket is also carried out, which represents not just giving money to support the parish, but also thanking God for the gifts received.

## WATER AND WINE

The priest takes the chalice, pours wine, and then adds a little water. The wine symbolizes the divinity of Christ and the water, his humanity: his two natures that mix without him ceasing to be one person. It also means that we are called to participate in the divine life of Jesus in our humanity by receiving his Body and Blood.

## HANDWASHING

The priest washes his hands to symbolize that something very important is about to happen and also because it represents the purity and cleanliness of heart that a person needs to have to get closer to God, who will soon be present in the Eucharist. This tradition was already present among the Levitical priests and is reflected in Psalm 24:3-4:

“ *Who may ascend the mountain of the Lord? Who may stand in his holy place? The one who has clean hands and a pure heart*”.



## PRAYER OVER THE OFFERINGS

Everyone stands up with the priest's invitation to prayer:

"Pray, brothers and sisters, that my sacrifice and yours may be acceptable to God, the almighty Father." The priest says "my sacrifice and yours." In other words, although the priest offers the sacrifice in person of Christ to the Father, the faithful are not mere spectators: they are too called to give themselves completely to the Father with their jobs, works, sacrifices, etc., and thus participate in the sacrifice of Christ on the cross *"for our good and all his holy Church."*

## EUCCHARISTIC PRAYER

### PREFACE

This prayer concludes the offertory and leads us to the consecration. It begins with a dialogue between the priest and the people and continues with a special prayer and the "Holy, Holy, Holy".

### "THE LORD BE WITH YOU"

This significant phrase is repeated so that we realize the importance of what is about to happen and so that God gives us grace to understand this mystery.

### "LIFT UP YOUR HEARTS"

Around the year 250 A.D., Saint Cyprian commented about these words of the Mass:

### "LET US GIVE THANKS TO THE LORD OUR GOD"

"It is right and just." People reply. Indeed! Because despite our sins and our lack of love, Christ has given himself out of love for us and has remained in the Eucharist for our salvation.

### "HOLY, HOLY, HOLY LORD GOD OF HOSTS..."

During this acclamation, we become aware of what is happening at Mass. With these words taken from the visions of the prophet Isaiah (Is 6:3) and Saint John (Rev 4:8), we realize that the angels and saints sing this hymn in heaven, and we join them: heaven and earth unite. We also repeat the words that the crowds used to greet Jesus in Jerusalem: "Hosanna!" (Mt 11:9); we are receiving the King who is about to make himself present in the Eucharist.

## THE CONSECRATION

The congregation kneels when the priest lays his hands over the bread and wine, asking for the outpouring of the Holy Spirit on those gifts, and says a prayer. Then, the priest says the words of consecration: "Take this, all of you, and eat of it, for this is my body, which will be given up for you..." then he does the same with wine.

## MASS AND THE JEWISH PASSOVER

But to understand these words we have to see them through the Jewish Passover, a holiday that celebrates the freedom of the People of God from slavery in Egypt (Ex 12). God commanded the Israelites to sacrifice an unblemished lamb, spread its blood on their doorframe to free them from the plague, and eat it, along with unleavened bread. The lamb, the blood and the bread were the main elements.


### JESUS, THE TRUE "LAMB OF GOD"


The Last Supper (the day in which Christ pronounced the words of consecration that the priest still recites during Mass) took place during the Jewish Passover celebration (Mt 26:19; Mk 14:16; Lk 22:13). But Christ did something unexpected. The Scriptures never mention a lamb at the Last Supper. Instead, Jesus speaks of his own body and his own blood "which will be poured out for you." Jesus presents himself as the true lamb that is going to be sacrificed! The lamb, the bread and the blood now refer to Jesus: the sacrificed lamb is him, the bread is his body and the wine is his blood. When speaking of his sacrifice, Jesus is speaking of his death on the cross.

## MASS, THE NEW PASSOVER CELEBRATION

Thus the Mass becomes the celebration of the "New Passover". We realize that the freedom from slavery in Egypt was foreshadow of the true freedom Christ would bring: freedom from sin and death, through his death and resurrection.

That is why Jesus in the Eucharist truly touches our life, our problems, our joys, our sorrows ... He has stayed to transform us, to free us from the slavery of sin and give us the true freedom that can only be found in him, to lead us to fulfillment that begins here and completes in heaven.

Besides giving himself to us completely, Christ makes us partakers of his salvation plan. In the Eucharist, the faithful are also called to unite their sufferings, their work, their praise and their prayer to those of Christ as an offering for the salvation of the world (CCC 1368). 

 *Let all the carnal and human thoughts disappear; at that moment do not let the soul think of anything other than the sole purpose of its prayer."*



BY VLADIMIR  
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# ‘Go and announce the Gospel of the Lord’: The Concluding Rites

Following Holy Communion, as you walk back to your pew after having received the most sacred Body and Blood of Jesus Christ, the only appropriate response is one of contemplation and awe. What a gift for the God of the Universe to allow us, his most precious creation, to partake in the sacred mystery of communion with him through the Eucharist.

Over the course of the celebration of the Mass, our minds have been fed, our souls have been nourished, and we have been physically united with Christ through the consumption of his flesh. As God’s chosen people, we are now prepared to go back out into the world, spiritually rejuvenated and refreshed, to share the Good News of the Gospel with those we encounter each day through our actions and through our words. But the Mass isn’t over quite yet.

## GREETING AND BLESSING

Once more, and for the final time in the Mass, the priest greets the congregation: “The Lord be with you,” and once more recognizing the spirit of Christ in the priest, the congregation responds: “And with your spirit.”

Following this, the priest offers a blessing to the congregation. Usually, it is a simple trinitarian blessing, but on special occasions, the priest may instruct the congregation to bow down to receive a longer blessing.

Priestly blessings can be found all throughout the Old Testament and are yet another tangible example of the connection the modern Church has to the early Church. Blessings are much more than simply some nice words; they invoke the spirit of God and are a powerful reminder of what we were created for: to love and be loved by God. As you make the Sign of the Cross while the priest says the blessing, remember who you belong to and how you came to belong to Him. It is through the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass and it alone that we experience full communion with the Lord.

## DISMISSAL

After this final blessing, the congregation is dismissed. In the early Church, the Latin words used to send people forth were “Ite, missa est” (literally meaning “Go, she—meaning you, the Church—has been sent”). The word “Mass” takes its namesake from “Missa,”



which is related to the word “Missio” – the English root of the word “mission.”

The Church, in her wisdom, has always recognized that its mission is not to sit in a fortified bunker protected from the world and its culture, but rather to go out and proclaim the Gospel. This command is reflected in the final proclamation of the Mass, which is always one of the following four phrases: “Go forth, the Mass is ended”; “Go and announce the Gospel of the Lord”; “Go in peace, glorifying the Lord by your life”; “Go in peace.” The common thread between these four phrases? GO.

Pope Benedict XVI wrote about the missionary nature of the Church and its relation to the Mass in *Sacramentum Caritatis*: “After the blessing, the deacon or the priest dismisses the people with the words: *Ite*,

*missa est*. These words help us to grasp the relationship between the Mass just celebrated and the mission of Christians in the world. In antiquity, *missa* simply meant ‘dismissal.’ However in Christian usage it gradually took on a deeper meaning. The word ‘dismissal’ has come to imply a ‘mission.’ These few words succinctly express the missionary nature of the Church. The People of God might be helped to understand more clearly this essential dimension of the Church’s life, taking the dismissal as a starting- point.”

So, in heeding these final words, this final call, this holy command: Let us go forth and announce the Gospel of the Lord, glorifying the Lord by our lives.



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