



TEACHING ON THE MASS

PART FIVE: CONCLUDING RITES

A few years ago, I went on a hiking trip into the back country of the Denali National Park in Alaska. It was an amazing experience—truly being in the middle of nowhere. The closest place of “civilization” was over 500 miles away and the only way to get there was by plane. It was a beautiful location, but something happened there that I had never experienced before: the sun never really went down. Technically it did not remain day the whole time because the sun *did* “set” to a point, but it never really got dark. At 1 AM in the morning it felt like 1 PM in the afternoon. And it was a little difficult for me to manage because darkness helps me fall asleep. However, it was also kind of cool. This leads me to an important part for our lives. The truth for our lives is that *our* Son is never intended to set. Our lives should always be reflecting Christ in every word we speak and every action we take. The Concluding Rite of the Mass can help us remember this. It is not really the end of the celebration; rather, it is intended to be a transition because we are told to go out and live what we have just experienced.

The Concluding Rite brings the celebration to a close and also prepares us to go forth. *Ite Missa est* is the Latin phrase that ends the celebration, and it is where the word Mass is derived. Mass is a corruption of the word *Missa* which means to be sent forth. The dismissal is the moment when Christ commissions us to live out the liturgy in our lives. It reminds us that the Mass is not simply about the reception of communion. It is not intended to ever be a “me and Jesus” moment. It is never appropriate to receive the Eucharist and then leave the celebration, for in doing so we are focusing the celebration on what we have done. This is why it is so important not to leave Mass before the dismissal. If we miss this great commissioning, then we will miss Christ blessing us and sending us out to be his disciples whom He has redeemed, to live the mystery of salvation we have just participated in, and to proclaim in our lives what God has proclaimed to us. Leaving early means that we have not truly completed our worship of God in the way Christ, or the Church, calls us to. And the real question we must ask ourselves is: what is more important in our lives than worshiping God. What cannot wait another five or ten minutes when the Mass is the most important action of our life? The dismissal reminds us—as the liturgy makes Christ visible to us—that we must acknowledge in our lives the many ways Christ is present and, similarly, make Christ present to others. We hear the words of the dismissal: “Go and announce the Gospel of the Lord” or “Go in peace, glorifying the Lord by your life.” It is our duty then to live out what we just celebrated, in order that others may come to know the faith through the words and actions of those who profess faith in the Risen One.

If we think about what we do in the Mass, it easily corresponds to how we are called to live in Christ. The Mass really is intended to be a blueprint for how we are to live out a life in Christ. As we wake up in the morning, we are called to recognize the presence of God in our lives and to reflect on the meaning of the day in Christ. This is what we do in the Introductory Rites as we begin with a song that reflects the meaning of our celebration. Then, we are able to recognize God’s presence through the Sign of the Cross and the apostolic greeting, “The Lord be with you.” Once we recognize the presence of God in our life, we should reflect on how our lives are not always in accord with Christ. We should reflect on those times when we might have failed to live as God has called us to, and to seek his mercy and grace in order to live differently both now and in the future. That is what we do in the Penitential Rite and the Kyrie. Our reflection on God’s mercy in our lives should lead us to praise of God and to prayer, as in the Mass when we sing the Gloria and pray the Opening Prayer. As we open to God in prayer in our lives, we become more open to listen attentively to God speaking to us in many and varied ways in our daily life. Similarly, the Introductory Rites prepare us to listen attentively to the proclamation of God’s word in the Liturgy of the Word. As the Liturgy of the Word prepares us, in part, to celebrate and experience the salvation offered to us through the Liturgy of the Eucharist, so do our daily prayers and listening for God’s word help prepare us to experience his salvation as a reality in our daily lives. When we understand that our lives are about living out the salvation Christ has won for us, then the four actions of Christ in the Liturgy of the Eucharist—to take, bless or give thanks, break and share—become the basis for how we are called to act toward others. Like Christ, we take the gifts the Father has given us in our life and return a prayer of thanksgiving and gratitude towards God. This recognition, that all we have comes from the Lord, should fill us with a desire to break open our lives and give ourselves as gift to others, just as Christ does for us in the

Eucharist. In that way we become the presence of Christ in the lives of others; we become what we have received—the body of Christ.

The Mass, then, is not simply something we do on Sunday; it is the very **model** for living out our lives in Christ. It forms us through Word and sacrament and transforms us through the grace received. This celebration gives us the strength to both live out and become what we receive and, therefore, becomes the central reality of our lives as disciples of Christ, being sent to love and serve the world. The Mass leads us on the adventure that is Emmaus of discovering Christ in our lives, and through that experience of discovering ourselves. The Mass is not simply something we do; it should become who we are in Christ—his very presence in the world. The Concluding Rites set us up to do just that as we are sent forth by Christ into the world to live out what we have just celebrated and experienced.

There is one aspect of the Mass that we have not explored up to this point. It is our right and duty to participate fully in all aspects of the liturgy through prayer, for each action of the celebration calls for some form of participation by the whole congregation. What form this participation takes is determined by the action occurring in the liturgy. For example, in the Liturgy of the Word we participate by sitting, and then listening and meditating on the word proclaimed. This listening and meditating is not to be understood as a passive response but, rather, as an active response to the Spirit who makes the word effective to those properly disposed.

We are, therefore, called to engage in the full spectrum of liturgical prayer. This participation is manifested through such actions as the common gestures and postures, verbal assent to the prayers offered by the priest, raising our voices in song, and meditating in silence on the word proclaimed. Thus, prayer is not simply about the words being said, nor is it simply an intellectual exercise. Rather, liturgical prayer is intended to engage a person on all levels of his or her being. Our mind, soul and body are all part of our prayer. We are human beings after all and, as such, we are called to a truly holistic approach to prayer. The entire person must be engaged. Hence, we do what I like to call Catholic calisthenics: we stand, we sit, we kneel. Each of these postures have a theological meaning to them. When we stand together, it is a sign that we are praying as a resurrected people. In our baptism, we died and rose with Christ to new life. The posture of standing speaks to this reality. We sit as a sign that we are attentively listening, as stated above. We kneel as a sign of adoration. During the Eucharistic prayer we kneel in humility as we enter into the full presence of the living God. And we come to adore our God most powerfully in the Eucharistic presence of Christ. Our body's senses are also engaged through sound, people speaking, bells, music, and the like. We also are engaged through smells particularly during the use of incense which acts as a sign that our prayers are rising up to the Lord. So, we can see that in the liturgy our whole person is intended to be engaged in prayer. As our body is part of the gift of life that God has given us, we must use it in our prayers to Him.

A final point that must be noted, though, is that the full effectiveness of the liturgy on person's life depends on a proper disposition. One must be open to cooperate with divine grace by uniting mind and heart to what he or she is giving voice to, by participating in the liturgy. Without doing this, it is difficult—if not impossible—for a person to achieve the sense of being truly engaged and living out what they have celebrated in the Mass.

Therefore, through this worship of God, we become sanctified and then sent forth to spread the faith of Christ in the world. We are called to preach the Good News of Christ—in essence, to live apostolic lives by living out our faith. In other words, we are sent forth from the celebration of Mass to be a people who give praise and thanksgiving to God, to be “a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God’s own people” (1 Pt 2:9). The Mass strengthens and prepares us to do just that so that we can come back and celebrate what we have lived. The Constitution rightly asserts, then, that the liturgy is the “summit toward which the activity of the Church is directed; at the same time, it is the fount from which all the Church’s power flows.”¹

If you have any questions about anything, please do not hesitate to ask me directly, or send your questions to me at fr.brian@theholyrood.org. Please keep me in your prayers.

¹ SC no. 10