

DISMISSAL

Introduction

At this time in the life of the English speaking Church, the understanding of dismissal has layers of meaning. The Church comes to the end of this liturgical year – the year of the Lord 2011 – and enters another year next weekend as we celebrate the First Sunday of Advent. With the close of one, we go forward on mission into another – a new year. The sequence of ending and beginning marks a dismissal. We are “dismissed.” As we conclude this past year of formation opportunities and the past seven weeks of parish formation on the Roman Missal, we are dismissed to pray the new Missal. Readings on the history of Eucharist indicate that during the Middle Ages, the most common name in Latin for this central and mystical ritual of sacrifice and celebration is *Missa*, which simply means “Dismissed.” Thus, each and every Sunday, the conclusion of Mass is a dismissal; an ending and a beginning.

Structure of the Dismissal

Once the priest has offered the Prayer After Communion, a brief but slightly expanded concluding rite parallels earlier ritual dismissals in the evolution of the Eucharist (GIRM 90).

First, if announcements are necessary, they should follow the Prayer After Communion. Parishes should determine simple criteria for verbal announcements that include few in number, spoken brevity, and a lack of random or last minute inclusions. The verbal announcements should not overshadow the significance of the Concluding Rites and specifically the depth of the dismissal. (*On rare occasion, if a more expanded announcement takes place, this should occur before the Introductory Rites or after the Concluding Rites or dismissal.*)

Second, after the brief announcements, the priest addresses the assembly again with a simple and familiar greeting, “The Lord be with you.” These words, taken from the lips of the angel of the Lord are a divine calling and sending, spoken through the priest’s lips. Yet, those assembled rightly feel unable to meet this tremendous call on their own initiative. It is the Lord who reminds them again that He shall be with them going forward (Cf. Judges 6:12-16). Then, the assembly response “And with your spirit” affirms belief in the Lord’s abiding presence. In the act of sending or missioning, the people are not sent to accomplish the tasks of the Lord on their own. That is impossible! It is God who has nourished them and leads them in the ways of salvation for all.

As the faithful prepare to be dismissed, the principal celebrant blesses the assembled with the sign of our faith through the Trinitarian formula: “May almighty God bless you, the Father, and the Son, and the Holy Spirit.” Blessed by God and with faith in the Lord’s words, “I shall be with you,” the faithful respond “Amen.” (*On more festive occasions following the simple greeting and response, the priest offers a solemn prayer or a three-fold solemn blessing which precedes the final blessing. If a bishop is principal celebrant or presiding at the Mass, then he may impart the pontifical blessing.*)

Third, Mass is concluded with a formal dismissal, said or chanted by the priest or deacon (when present). With the new Missal, four options are given. Familiar to many is “The Mass is ended...” which corresponds to the Latin text, *Ite, missa est*. The other three options were added upon a request by Pope Benedict XVI to make the missionary connection clear in the dismissal.

Our response to the dismissal remains “Thanks be to God.” What else can we do except give thanks to God for his undivided presence. He has provided us with his total self-gift in the Eucharistic sacrifice of Christ by which he draws us and the entire world into closer communion with Him. Thus, as was noted in this introduction, the dismissal is not a mere ending. Rather, an ending gives way to a beginning, a mission forward: may each go out to do good works, praising and blessing God.

Fourth, the priest and deacon (when present) demonstrate reverence for the primary symbols of the Eucharistic sacrifice. The altar is kissed followed by a profound bow or genuflection (if the tabernacle is situated in the sanctuary [GIRM 274]) with other ministers. There is no mention of a recessional hymn. Instead a post communion hymn of praise may be sung prior to the Prayer After Communion (*see last week’s insert on the Communion Rite*). Dismissed, those who were gathered for the celebration should also, in posture and gesture, demonstrate reverence for the primary symbols.

Conclusion

Pope Benedict XVI issued a summation and response to a gathering of certain bishops from around the world called together to discuss the Mass. Titled *The Sacrament of Charity* (or *Sacramentum Caritatis*), the Holy Father reflected upon our participation in the Eucharistic Liturgy. It should translate into a life in imitation of Christ. From the Sacred Liturgy the missionary nature of the Church should spring forward. When the Eucharistic celebration ends, the mission begins - or more appropriately, continues.

Finally, as we pray the Eucharistic liturgy with the New Roman Missal, may the texts of the liturgy positively impact the disposition the assembly should have to celebrate the Mass. As we enter this new liturgical year, let all commit to an attentive listening to God’s Word and to join ourselves to the one sacrifice of thanks. “Through Christ the Mediator we may be formed day by day into an ever more perfect unity with God and with each other so that finally, God may be in all” (CSL 48).