

WHY DO WE DO WHAT WE DO AT MASS?

COMMUNION RITE AND DISMISSAL

Introduction

The Communion Rite is celebrated as the culmination of the Liturgy of the Eucharist. It begins with the Lord's Prayer and continues through the Prayer after Communion. The Dismissal follows.

Structure of the Communion Rite

The Lord's Prayer (Our Father) was introduced into the Mass by Pope Gregory back in the sixth century. In the Mass, the Lord's Prayer is situated in a special place to reveal its full meaning and efficacy. It is placed between the just completed Eucharistic Prayer and reception of Communion. Thus, the Lord's Prayer sums up, on the one hand, all the petitions and intercessions just expressed in the main Eucharistic Prayer and, on the other hand, it anticipates the banquet of the kingdom which is experienced in Sacramental Communion. In the Lord's Prayer, a petition is made for daily food which, for Christians, means preeminently the Eucharistic bread and, in most communities, the cup of salvation.

Second, the sign of peace in the Eucharistic celebration is not just the passing peace of this world or good wishes to one another; it is truly the peace of Christ! This is not a greeting such as "Hi, how are you?". It is also not a chance to talk to those whom we missed greeting as we entered the church. It is a peace from the soul and to the soul, because we are inseparably united with one another and the Lord through baptism. When appropriate, all gathered extend a sign of Christ's peace to those around them.

Third, following the sign of peace, the Bread of Life is broken (fractioned) while the assembly sings the "Lamb of God" litany. This action of fractioning conveys that, even though we are many, we all seek to become one body in the Lord. Thus, the fractioning rite is not a utilitarian one designed to ensure that everyone receives communion. Rather the act is spiritual so that all can be nourished, including the members not present.

The Fraction Rite and the Reception of Communion are connected because the consecrated Bread, which was once whole, has been fractioned into many pieces and shared with us who are many. As the many receive the one Bread of Life and the Cup of Eternal Salvation, which is Christ, we are made one. This unity in Christ is demonstrated most clearly by consuming hosts consecrated at the Mass attended. The focus is on the action that takes place at the altar.

The Bishops of the United States have determined that in this country, the norm for the reception of Communion will be to stand. Also, a slight bow as an act of reverence is made just prior to reception of the body and blood of Christ. Those who partake in Communion may receive either in the hand or on the tongue. It is the individual receiving who decides which method they prefer, not the person distributing Communion. The Church has been quite clear about the issue of receiving the body and blood of Christ: Holy Communion has a fuller form as a sign when it is distributed under both kinds. Still those who receive under one form but not the other are not deprived of any grace.

Because this is a communal action, the entire assembly will remain standing until all have received communion and the remaining consecrated hosts are returned to the tabernacle. After all have received Communion, the priest and people may spend time together in silent prayer using one posture or a variety of postures.

The Communion Rite ends with the Prayer after Communion.

Structure of the Dismissal

Readings on the history of Eucharist indicate that during the Middle Ages, the most common name in Latin for “what we do” is *Missa*, which simply means “Dismissed.” Each and every Sunday, the conclusion of Mass is dismissal – an ending and a beginning.

First, if announcements are necessary, they should follow the Prayer after Communion. At CCOP there is a simple criteria for verbal announcements: few in number, short in content, and no random or last minute inclusions. The announcements must pertain to the whole parish. 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 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’s response “And with your spirit” affirms belief in the Lord’s abiding presence. In the act of sending or commissioning, 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.

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 first noted, 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.