



My Dear Brothers and Sisters,

We're at the end of the Mass, and so now we look at the Concluding Rites. After the Prayer After Communion, there is an opportunity for announcements (I know it seems like it must be a required part of Mass, since we always do it, but it truly is optional). Then there is the dismissal. Usually, the dismissal is simple: the priest says, "The Lord be with you." And the people reply, "And with your spirit." Sometimes before the final blessing, though, there is the "Prayer Over the People" (a single prayer asking God's blessing upon the people), or a "Solemn Blessing" (three prayers of blessing upon the people, each followed by an "Amen"). The priest then blesses the people: "May almighty God bless you, the Father, and the Son, + and the Holy Spirit." And the people reply: "Amen."

The word for blessing in Latin is *benedictio* which literally means good speaking.

We speak good about someone with the intention that the "good" comes about (as opposed to a malediction or curse, which is speaking evil about someone). When we receive a blessing, especially from an ordained minister, it is to receive God's good word – how He speaks in love over you. We know that God's WORD makes real what it speaks. When God speaks in Genesis, "Let there be light" (Gen 1:3) light happens! His WORD, we read in the first chapter of John, is Christ Himself. When God speaks *good* over us, good happens. He invites us to be open to receive that *good*. This particular blessing is a request to the Holy Trinity to pour down His good word upon us, so that all the good He desires for us be made real.

The Deacon or Priest then dismisses us with one of the following formulas:

- 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.

And the people reply: Thanks be to God.

Have you ever wondered why the Mass is structured this way – we work our way through the Liturgy of the Word, building up through the Liturgy of the Eucharist, with the climax of Holy Communion. Then, within a couple minutes, we're told to leave: "Go in peace." We have just received our Lord in the Word and in the Eucharist, and now we are empowered to go out and share the Good News of Jesus' love (this is seen more clearly in "Go and announce the Gospel of the Lord" and "Go in peace, glorifying the Lord by your life"). Jesus has come and touched us, and now we are to bring Him out to touch others. He is truly present in us, as we have received Him, and now His presence can touch the people around us who don't go to church. And we respond "Thanks be to God," not because we're glad to get out of here, but because we have been divinely commissioned to go forth!

The Mass ends with the priest venerating the altar with a kiss, and making a profound bow. The St. Michael Prayer and the Recessional Hymn are actually not part of the Mass, though custom allows for them.

Once the Mass is over, it is a laudatory practice to spend a couple of minutes in thanksgiving to God. It is not, however, a laudable practice to shout, argue, or cut someone off in the parking lot! We have received Jesus, and He is still sacramentally within us. We are called to witness to the world to His love inside of us.

We have made it to the end of the Mass. I hope that this reflection on the Mass, and specifically on the Eucharist for this time of revival, has been helpful to you. May you continue to grow in the incredible love that God has for you, and pours out upon you in the Holy Mass.