



Understanding the Mass

Part 6

The Concluding Rites

Continued from Last Week

Before delving into the Concluding Rites of the Mass, we need to finish the Rite of Communion. We left off with returning to your place after receiving Holy Communion and taking a moment to give thanks to God for the Gift of His Son and the salvation He won for us.

A Moment of Silence

The **General Instruction of the Roman Missal** reminds us here of the need for moments of silence in the Liturgy. As it does after the readings and the homily, the Roman Missal calls for the Priest and the faithful to “spend time praying privately.”

A song may be sung at this point, but the same instructions expect that it is sung by the whole assembly together as a sign of the communion they now share.

The Prayer After Communion

After a suitable time of private prayer, the Priest rises and invites the people to pray. According to the **Missal**, this prayer has a specific purpose – to pray that the Holy Communion we have just received may bear fruit in our lives, in the Church, and throughout the world.

The Concluding Rites

Announcements

Here is the appropriate time for making announcements. If there are relatively few, the people may remain standing or the Presider may ask the faithful to be seated. Announcements should NOT be made as part of the Rite of Communion. However, they may be made before the beginning of Mass.

The Final Blessing

The Priest now greets the people and the Deacon (or the Priest himself if no Deacon is present) invites them to bow their heads for the blessing. This blessing may be simple – the Sign of the Cross – or it may be enriched on special occasions with a longer solemn prayer of blessing or a four-fold invocation before the Sign of the Cross.

The Dismissal

After the Priest makes the Sign of the Cross in blessing, either he or the Deacon announces one of several forms of the dismissal – in Latin, “*Ite Missa est!*” Literally, “*Go forth, the Mass is ended.*” The Latin word “Missa” gives us the name for the whole Eucharistic

Liturgy, the Mass. The other dismissals help us to understand that – “*Go and announce the Gospel of the Lord*” and “*Go in peace, glorifying the Lord by your life.*” The sense here is that we, having heard the Word of the Lord and received the Body and Blood of the Lord, are now sent on mission. The **Catechism of the Catholic Church** explains that “*the Liturgy, in which the mystery of salvation is accomplished, concludes with the sending forth (mission) of the faithful, so that they may fulfill God’s*

will in their daily lives” (CCC 1332). Sharing the mission of Christ, we are sent to use our God-given abilities to evangelize, to comfort, and to help build up the Kingdom of God.

Reverence of the Altar

The Priest and Deacon then move to the Altar and reverence (kiss) it. This is done, as at the beginning of Mass, out of reverence for Christ, who is Himself the Altar of Sacrifice. The practice derives from the ancient Roman tradition of kissing the entrance to pagan temples and the Roman family tradition of kissing the table when they sat down to eat. The Church “baptized” these practices by reverencing the Altar, which contains a relic of a Saint, with a kiss.

The Concluding Procession

The Priest and other liturgical ministers then gather at the foot of the Altar, they genuflect (or make a profound bow) in unison, and follow the Cross in procession to the outside of the church – leading the faithful in the mission to glorify the Lord with their lives.



The Importance of Sacred Music

“The musical tradition of the universal Church is a treasure of inestimable value, greater even than that of any other art. The main reason for this preeminence is that, as a combination of sacred music and words, it forms a necessary or integral part of solemn liturgy” (Sacrosanctum Concilium #112). The composition and singing of inspired psalms, often accompanied by musical instruments, were already closely linked to the liturgical celebrations of the Old Covenant. The Church continues and develops this tradition: *“Address ... one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody to the Lord with all your heart.”* *“He who sings prays twice”* (Eph 5:19; Saint Augustine, En. in Ps. 72,1:PL 36,914; cf. Col 3:16) [CCC 1156].

There is a great need in most American parishes to rekindle the appreciation for sacred music and communal singing. Some cultures, like the Welsh and African American, take great pride in their choral tradition. Lay people can have a great impact on the liturgy by volunteering to join the choir, serve as a cantor, or play an instrument – we are especially in need of young people willing to play the church organ. The pipe organ has pride of place among all instruments and without competent organists, the Church will lose its liturgical voice.

The liturgy requires authenticity, so the use of recorded music is not permitted. Sacred Music needs to be the product of human activity – by the use of voice and instruments.

Sacred Music is NOT a performance. In many churches, the Music Ministry is located at the front in the hopes of encouraging the assembly to sing. However, for too many, it is seen as a concert that is to be enjoyed, not as an aid to their participation in singing.

The Tabernacle

In the Old Testament, the People of God wandered in the desert for 40 years. During that time, God made His dwelling among them in a tent or tabernacle. The word “tabernacle” literally means “dwelling.” And so it is in the church that the Tabernacle is the place where Christ dwells in the Eucharist.

The Tabernacle must be made of solid and opaque material. It must also have a locked door. In the Diocese of Camden, it must also be secured by an alarm. All of this is to prevent the Eucharist from being profaned or desecrated. The Blessed Sacrament is kept in the Tabernacle for two (2) purposes: in order that the sick may receive Holy Communion, especially if they are dying; and also for private prayer – that any of us may go before the Blessed Sacrament for a time of prayer.

Liturgical Colors

The liturgical life of the Church involves the use of color to signify the meaning of particular seasons and / or celebrations. Green is worn during Ordinary Time (those weeks that are counted). Purple, a sign of penitence, is worn during Advent and Lent as the Church prepares for the important Solemnities of Christmas and Easter. It may also be worn for funerals and on days of penance. White is worn during the Christmas and Easter Seasons and on other feast days that honor Christ, the Blessed Virgin Mary, and the Saints who are not martyrs. Red is worn at celebrations of the Passion of Christ, the Holy Spirit, the Holy Cross, and on the feast of Saints who are martyrs. Black may also be used on the occasion of Masses for the Dead and funerals.



Incense

The use of incense in ancient religious rites is well documented – to ward off evil spirits and to create a cloud of “mystery.” The use of incense in the Catholic liturgy is an adaptation of these ancient uses. For Catholics, incense purifies and blesses the persons and objects that are incensed. At the same time, the holy smoke lifts up to heaven and takes with it the prayers of God’s people.

Candles

The use of candles in the liturgy was both practical (the need for light) and symbolic – as candles add beauty and solemnity to the Mass. They represent Christ, the Light of the World, and our call to bring that light to others. They also serve as a symbol for our prayers – who hasn’t lit a candle for a loved one?