

The Concluding Rite

The Concluding Rite is a very brief and simple part of the Mass. It fills less than one page in the Order of Mass in the Roman Missal. Less than the rites for preparing the gifts and altar (2 pages) or the Introductory Rites (11 pages).

It is but briefly described in the *General Instruction of the Roman Missal*.

The concluding rites consist of:

- a) brief announcements, if they are necessary;
- b) the priest's greeting and blessing, which on certain days and occasions is enriched and expressed in the prayer over the people or another more solemn formula;
- c) the dismissal of the people by the deacon or the priest, so that each member goes out to do good works, while praising and blessing God;
- d) the kissing of the altar by the priest and the deacon, followed by a profound bow to the altar by the priest, the deacon, and the other ministers.

General Instruction of the Roman Missal 3rd edition, 90

But it is a most important part of the liturgy. The name that Roman Catholics commonly give to the celebration of the Eucharist - the Mass - comes, most agree, from the Latin words of the dismissal text: *Ite Missa est* - Go, the Mass is ended. We Catholics call the whole liturgy after the dismissal. Which is odd, but suggests something of the significance that the dismissal has. We go to Mass to be dismissed. We go as disciples who have got hungry again, and we are fed by word and sacrament, to be sent back to where we came from, strong in the Lord, to do his work.

A well-prepared and celebrated Concluding Rite can help us remember that. A weak Concluding Rite can leave us feeling that, well, what ever happens next is down to us, our likes and dislikes, mission is optional, ok for those who want to get involved in that sort of thing. This is very far from being authentic to what the liturgy is intended to achieve.

At the end of Mass, we are sent forth in peace to love and serve the Lord, in deeper communion, we hope, with each other and with the whole Church. We receive the body of Christ so that we may go forth as the Body of Christ into the world, the living sacrament of his presence in the midst of others. Through the Eucharist we become more profoundly the Church, and we are sent forth as the Church

to fulfil our mission in and for the world... Our communion with Christ means that we share not only his life but also his mission. At each Eucharist, the Risen Christ says to us anew: 'As the Father sent me, so am I sending you', and breathes his Spirit upon us. The Spirit we receive anoints us afresh to bring good news to the poor, since any true communion with the living Lord will lead us to recognise him in the most in need.'

One Bread One Body. A teaching document on the Eucharist in the life of the Church. Catholic Bishops' Conference of England and Wales, Ireland and Scotland. (1998). Paragraph 66.

Mass, though the source and summit of Christian life, is not an end in itself. We acknowledge this in the prayers of the Mass. For example in the Eucharistic Prayer for Masses for Various Needs and Occasions, we pray:

*Open our eyes to the needs of all;
inspire us with words and deeds
to comfort those who labour and are burdened;
keep our service of others
faithful to the example of Christ.*

*Let your Church be a living witness
to truth and freedom, to justice and peace,
that all people may be lifted up
by the hope of a world made new.*

The way we celebrate the Concluding Rite is one indication of how seriously we take such words.

A distinct Rite

The Communion Rite ends with the Post-Communion Prayer. That prayer will have been preceded by silence and perhaps also a song of thanksgiving. And now a new Rite begins which brings the whole of the celebration to a conclusion and prepares us for the living that will come next.

As with the transition from Liturgy of the Word to the Liturgy of the Eucharist and from the Eucharistic Prayer to the Communion Rite there needs to be a moment's pause as we end one part of the action and begin another. It need not be above a moment's pause, but the transition needs to be marked.

Notices

The next liturgical text that we find in the Missal is that for greeting before dismissal. But the liturgy is not just the liturgical texts. It is this assembly celebrating the liturgy that it might have life. And as we know there is more to life than liturgy.

So, from time to time, there will need to be 'notices', announcements of things that the community needs to hear of. Most of the details of the other activities in the community's life in common will be in the newsletter or on the parish notice-boards. But sometimes there will be things that need to be spoken of. This is the time in the Mass for that.

Formerly it was common for notices to be given at the time of the sermon. Notices of parish activity are far from unimportant, but they are not part of the prayerful reflection to which all are called in the Liturgy of the Word. Thus they are placed at a 'softer' part of the Mass, the Concluding Rite.

Sometimes these notices will be very brief. From time to time however there will be need for a longer presentation on some item of common concern - perhaps news of the parish CAFOD project, or of the fundraising work for a local hospice. Sometimes there will be mission appeals. This is the time for any such appeal, not at the time of the homily, which is the time for preaching on God's word, not for money. If an appeal is to be given it is desirable that the person making it participate in the whole celebration

These notices and appeals should be delivered elsewhere than from the ambo, the table of the word, which should be reserved for the proclamation of the word and the Prayer of the Faithful which directly relates to it.

By tradition the notices are given by the deacon. Alternatively they may be given by the priest or another member of the community.

Communion to the Sick

Every encouragement should be given for Holy Communion to be taken from Sunday Mass to those parishioners who are sick or housebound. It is a clear and simple way of indicating that although presently unable to be part of the Sunday assembly, the Sunday assembly is praying for them and anxious to care for them.

Sunday will be a day of special significance for the sick and housebound as it is for all Christians, so again it is important to do what can be done to allow this to remain the day above all days when they are able to receive Holy Communion from the parish's Mass.

There is no mandated time during the Mass when the ministers to the sick and housebound should receive the pyx from the priest and be sent to those they serve, though clearly this does not happen until after they themselves have received Holy Communion during the Mass. Sometimes the ministers will collect the Sacrament after Mass is over, but it is preferable that they be 'sent' from the assembly during Mass. This way the whole assembly are helped to remain mindful of this work being done in the name of their community.

Perhaps the most appropriate times for the ministers to receive their pyx and be 'sent' to perform their ministry are either after the Communion of the people or immediately before the final blessing. The ministers may then depart before the post-Communion prayer, after the post-Communion prayer or as part of the concluding procession of ministers. Local circumstances will determine which of these various options will be most fitting in any particular parish.

The Presider will normally speak words of dismissal or missioning over the ministers. He might base these words on the Communion antiphon, on the readings of the day, the themes of the Liturgical season or use a simple form such as the following, taken from *Celebrating the Mass* (a pastoral guide to the Mass published by the Bishops' Conference of England and Wales):

*Go now, to our sisters and brothers
unable to be with us
for reasons of sickness and infirmity.
Take to them from our celebration
the Word of God and Holy Communion,
that they might share with us
these signs of the Lord's goodness.*

Concluding Words

Following the Blessing, the priest is permitted to 'very briefly conclude the entire sacred action in his own words before the Dismissal.' (*Roman Missal*, 142.) The words 'very briefly' should be taken to heart. This is not time for a second homily - but simply perhaps some particular aspect of the celebration to be briefly returned to, its significance noted, or some particular

aspect of the mission of the Church and of this particular assembly to be adverted to. Such brief words can be very helpful in tying the whole experience of the Mass together.

The Rite of Dismissal

After the notices, the possible 'sending' of the commissioned ministers of Holy Communion, and his concluding words, the presider once more addresses the congregation as a whole and re-establishes the sense of formal prayer

The Lord be with you.

And also with you.

The presider then blesses the people.

*May almighty God bless you,
the Father, and the Son, + and the Holy Spirit.
Amen.*

The simple standard form is generally used but there are alternative texts which may be used instead.

The first alternative form is that of the Solemn Blessing. Texts are provided for

- Solemn Blessings during the Proper of Seasons - for Advent; Christmas; Beginning of the New Year; Epiphany; The Passion of the Lord; Easter Vigil and Easter Sunday; Easter Season; Ascension; and Pentecost.
- There are also 5 sets of Solemn Blessing which may be used during Ordinary Time
- In addition there are forms for Solemn Blessings for the Celebrations of the Saints - the Blessed Virgin Mary; Ss Peter and Paul; Apostles; All Saints.
- Finally there are forms for the Dedication of a Church, for Masses for the Dead. (*Roman Missal, p367-377*)

All the solemn blessings have the same three part form, concluding with the Trinitarian Blessing seen in the example below for Masses for the Dead. This solemn blessing might well find a use during the month of November, perhaps on Remembrance Sunday or at special parish commemorations of its dead.

*In his great love,
the God of all consolation gave man the gift
of life. May he bless you with faith in the
resurrection of his Son, and with the hope of
rising to new life.
Amen.*

*To us who are alive may he grant forgiveness,
and to all who have died a place of light and
peace.
Amen.*

*As you believe that Jesus rose from the dead,
so may you live with him for ever in joy.
Amen.*

*May almighty God bless you,
the Father, and the Son, + and the Holy Spirit.
Amen.*

One of the important features of the Solemn Blessing is the exchange between priest and assembly. The prayer of the priest is responded to by the repeated Amen of the assembly. It falls rather flat when the assembly is not sure when to respond, with the consequence that the rhythm is lost, and the Amen effectively forced from the assembly rather than being its eager response. Sometimes priests try to elicit the response by accompanying their prayer with the raising of their hands over the assembly for the prayer and closing them when each verse is ended. A more effective way of eliciting the desired response, which also marks the solemnity proper to the Blessing is for it to be chanted. The Missal provides a chant tone. (*Roman Missal, p 364-366*)

In addition to the Solemn Blessing the Missal provides 24 optional Prayers over the People for use at the end of the Mass, plus an additional 2 Prayers over the People for use at the end of Mass on the Feasts of Saints, (*Roman Missal, p380-4*). These have a simpler form than the Solemn Blessing, as in the following one which would be especially appropriate to use during Season V, given the focus of both on the mission of the Church.

*Lord,
we pray for your people who believe in you.
May they enjoy the gift of your love,
share it with others,
and spread it everywhere.
We ask this in the name of Jesus the Lord.
Amen.*

*May almighty God bless you,
the Father, and the Son, + and the Holy Spirit.
Amen.*

Again the Missal provides a chant that may be used with these Prayers. (*Roman Missal, p378f*)

Dismissal

Following the blessing the assembly is formally dismissed by the deacon or, in the absence of a deacon, by the presider.

The Missal provides three forms of the Dismissal. It is unfortunate that sometimes these are conflated as then it is less easy to provide variety, or to use the most opportune text to its greatest effect. Again there are chant settings provided in the Missal. (Roman Missal, p128) Their use brings a greater dignity to the rite.

The three forms are

- *Go in the peace of Christ.*
- *The Mass is ended, go in peace.*
- *Go in peace to love and serve the Lord.*

The third form is likely to prove the most useful for Season V.

In each case the response to the Dismissal is Thanks be to God.

The thanksgiving is not of course offered for the simple fact that Mass is ended! It is rather a thanksgiving for all that the Mass has been: an occasion when once more God's chosen people have been able to be together in his presence, and to be nourished by word and sacrament. It is a thanksgiving too for the life to which all are now sent – replete with Christ's peace, and with opportunity for faithful witness and service.

The Final Hymn

Following the dismissal the priest kisses the altar and he and the other ministers make the usual signs of reverence and leave. The Roman Rite makes no mention of 'the final hymn'.

Although 'the final hymn' has taken on an almost unquestioned place in the practice of many parishes, its place ought not to be taken for granted. There is a full discussion of the pros and cons of the practice in the Chapter on Music. What is necessary is that there be careful thought about what we prepare for a liturgy, and being attentive as to how well what we plan actually serves the prayer of the assembly.

And what do we go to?

One of the famous statements about the liturgy that comes from Vatican II is that the Liturgy is the source and summit of Christian life.

'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'

(*Sacrosanctum Concilium* 10)

As hopefully we have become more aware during the At Your Word, Lord process, the Liturgy provides a place where the community brings all the experiences of its life before the Lord - for thanksgiving, in repentance, in need of assistance and mercy and love, all according to our particular circumstances. It is also a place where we have the opportunity to receive much - in the way of encouragement and forgiveness and healing - so that we may go out ready to live strong in faith.

Those with responsibility for preparing the liturgy need to do all that they can to ensure that the liturgy they prepare for this community responds to this particular community's circumstances and needs.

'Ample flexibility is given for appropriate creativity aimed at allowing each celebration to be adapted to the needs of the participants, to their comprehension, their interior preparation and their gifts, according the established liturgical norms. In the songs, the melodies, the choice of prayers and readings, the giving of the homily, the preparation of the prayer of the faithful, the occasional explanatory remarks and the decoration of the church building according the various seasons, there is ample possibility for introducing into each celebration a certain variety by which the riches of the liturgical tradition will also be more clearly evident, and so, in keeping with pastoral requirements, the celebration will be carefully imbued with those particular features that will foster the recollection of the participants. Still, it should be remembered that the power of the liturgical celebrations does not consist in frequently altering the rites, but in probing more deeply the word of God and the mystery being celebrated.'

(*Redemptionis Sacramentum* 39)

In addition to the responsibility that lies with those preparing the celebration to do so mindful of the needs and circumstances of those who participate, all of those who participate are invited to do so to the fullness of their ability. Each one present, lay or ordained, with particular ministry at this celebration or not, is called to full, active and conscious participation. This is the right and the obligation of the baptised, and

it is demanded by the very nature of the Liturgy. (cf. *Sacrosanctum Concilium* 14)

‘Participation...in the Eucharist and in the other celebrations of the Church’s rites cannot be equated with mere presence, and still less with a passive one, but is rather to be regarded as a true exercise of faith and of the baptismal dignity.’

(*Redemptionis Sacramentum* 37)

Each participant needs to make the connections between his and her life and the celebration of the Liturgy. No one else can do this for us. No one else, for example, can listen to the Lord on our behalf in the Liturgy of the Word:, no one else can hear what he is saying to each one, and no one else can respond to him in prayer on our behalf. Such things are our personal responsibility.

So too is the responsibility to live the faith beyond the liturgy itself, holding fast in our lives to what we have grasped by our faith (cf. *Sacrosanctum Concilium* 10). Some have suggested that the rhythm that is set up between our life before a celebration of the liturgy, the liturgy, and our life following the celebration can be described as a cycle, a Pastoral Cycle. The Liturgy provides a time for reflection on our living, and our living a time for testing out what we have understood and what we believe, and being tested with regard to our faithfulness. Being attentive to this cyclic process provides us with a greater opportunity yet to take responsibility for ourselves, for how we pray and worship, and how we understand and live the faith.

The series of *At Your Word Lord* ‘Liturgy Preparation’ books has focussed on Sunday Mass. We need more than Sunday Mass for a healthy Christian life. And so *At Your Word Lord* has encouraged us to meet in small groups too, reflecting on the Sunday readings and on our experiences, to deepen our ownership of the Faith. How might we continue that beyond the seasons of *At Your Word Lord*? At the time of writing it is not clear what processes are going to be encouraged by the Diocese at large, either through the *Graced by the Spirit* initiative or by the Department for Lifelong Learning and Catechesis. However if by the time of reading no centrally provided resources are available it is not difficult to resource such groups for a process of Lectionary based reflection. If no other resources are available a simple guide to this will be published by the Liturgy Commission.

Sunday Mass is a very rich resource for our Christian living but it has its own focus - the Paschal Mystery of Christ’s Passion, Death and Resurrection. Although we approach this Mystery in different ways Sunday by Sunday, and especially in the different liturgical seasons, there are other aspects of Christian faith and life that we need to reflect on - particularly dimensions of our common life in the world at large. The Bishops’ Conference seeks to encourage reflection on this with its Cycle of Prayer. More information is available from the Bishops’ Conference website. Sometimes these themes for prayer will find expression in the Prayer of the Faithful on Sundays, but the place for their fuller exploration is outside of the Sunday liturgy, during weekday celebrations of Mass and other times of liturgical and of private prayer.

Making these connections is something of importance for the health and roundedness of every Catholic life. Ensuring that attention is paid to assisting this to happen is a responsibility for the parish as a whole - perhaps especially for those responsible for continuing adult formation in the parish, and for the Parish Council in its wider pastoral oversight. It is not a matter that belongs to the Liturgy Preparation Group alone - far from it. The role of the Liturgy Preparation Group is to be aware of the priorities set by the parish in this respect, and to assist in resourcing the prayer and worship.

Broader role of the Liturgy Preparation Group

This sort of collaborative working is typical of much that the Liturgy Preparation Group is likely to find itself involved in. Others include the initial and continuing formation of liturgical ministers, in reviewing the contribution that the worship of the parish makes to parish life, and in taking steps to arrange for continuing liturgical formation for itself and for the parish more broadly. Few of these, if any, should the Group have to tackle alone, but the Group does have an interest in ensuring that all of these matters are addressed in a positive and constructive way. It is the desire of the Diocesan Liturgy Commission to support Parish Groups in their work in a variety of ways over the years to come, by regular formation days - organised for the Diocese as a whole, but also for more local gatherings, for example in Deaneries or groups of Deaneries, by publications, including the twice-yearly *Westminster Worship*

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series of sheets which are circulated to parishes and are available for downloading from the Diocesan website, and resources for Liturgy Preparation prepared by the Liturgy Office of the Bishops Conference for England and Wales (www.liturgyoffice.org.uk).

Parish groups and individual ministers are always welcome to approach the Diocesan Liturgy Commission with comments or suggestions concerning the sort of support that they would find helpful.