



## FR. DANIEL'S CORNER

Mass Moment: Part 31

### CONCLUDING RITE PART 2: CALLED TOGETHER TO BE SENT

The concluding rite of the Eucharist is brief and deceptively simple: a greeting, the final blessing, and the dismissal to which the assembly responds “Thanks be to God.” The meaning of the dismissal, however, runs far deeper.

Pope John Paul II has written: “The dismissal at the end of each Mass is a charge given to Christians, inviting them to work for the spread of the Gospel and the imbuing of society with Christian values” (Mane nobiscum Domine, no. 24).

The Latin for the dismissal, *Ite, missa est*, can be translated either as “Go, the Mass is ended” or as “Go, you are sent.” Choosing the latter rendition, Pope Benedict XVI has written: “These few words succinctly express the missionary nature of the Church. The People of God might be helped to understand more clearly this essential dimension of the Church’s life, taking the dismissal as a starting-point” (Sacramentum Caritatis, no. 51). Two versions of the dismissal newly added in the revised Roman Missal also stress this missionary function: “Go and announce the Gospel of the Lord,” and “Go in peace, glorifying the Lord by your life.” In the words of a faculty colleague, Anthony J. Gittins, CSSP, disciples are those who are called to be sent and are co-missioned along with Jesus, who was sent to bring into the world the total and unconditional self-giving love of God.

The primary mission on which disciples are sent at the conclusion of each Eucharistic celebration has been described in church documents as the “silent proclamation” of the Gospel by the witness of their lives. In a 1975 apostolic exhortation, Pope Paul VI gave a stirring description of how this silent proclamation is carried out:

“Take a Christian or a handful of Christians who, in the midst of their own community, show their capacity for understanding and acceptance, their sharing of life and destiny with other people, their solidarity with the efforts of all for whatever is noble and good. Let us suppose that, in addition, they radiate in an altogether simple and unaffected way their faith in values that go beyond current values, and their hope in something that is not seen and that one would not dare to imagine. Through this wordless witness these Christians stir up irresistible questions in the hearts of those who see how they live: Why are they like this? Why do they live in this way? What or who is it that inspires them? Why are they in our midst? Such a witness is already a silent proclamation of the Good News and a very powerful and effective one. Here we have an initial act of evangelization” (Evangelii Nuntiandi, no. 21).

The liturgical dismissal, then, sends us back into the life-mission to which we have been called, to what Ion Bria has named “the liturgy after the liturgy” or others “the liturgy of the neighbor.” It is that liturgy of life from which we return and which we bring back to the liturgy of the Eucharist when we gather again. Reflecting on the words of Pope Benedict as cited above, Gregory Pierce counsels us to think of the gathering not simply as a coming together, but rather as a return from mission. With that, the cycle between the Eucharistic liturgy and the liturgy of life is completed, a cycle (or better, a spiral) ready to be repeated again and again. Surely, then, the gathering and sending rites, the indispensable liturgical bridge by which we move back and forth between Eucharist and Christian life, deserve our full personal attention and pastoral care.

To what are Catholics called? To answer that question, with which this series began, we can do no better at this time of change than to focus and reflect on the deeper meaning of what we do in the Eucharist. It gathers up the life of discipleship to which we have been sent the previous week, offers it to God as a “living sacrifice” along with that of Christ, and sends us back into daily life, into the liturgy after the liturgy. There we are to live out the pattern of Christ’s self-emptying love, giving ourselves to others by serving them in their needs. There we are to live out the Amen we have proclaimed in the liturgy, so that we may enter more fully into the Amen of Christ when we gather again to celebrate the Eucharist. In the Eucharist we are called to be sent.

*And that is your Mass Moment for the week.*