

Series on the Mass, Part 78: Ite Missa Est

Oct. 3, 2021

Having read the Postcommunion prayers, the priest returns to the center of the altar. Again he places his hands on the altar and kisses it as before, then turns to the faithful saying "Dominus vobiscum". The faithful again responds "Et cum spiritu tuo". The priest continues with the dismissal, saying or singing "Ite Missa est" (Go, the Mass is ended). At one time this was the end of Mass, and the faithful would depart. Now there is still another quiet prayer, the blessing, and the Last Gospel before the faithful leave.

One might ask why wasn't the Ite Missa Est moved to the very end? The reason goes back to how the blessing was introduced at the end of the Mass. In the early liturgies, there was no blessing given by the priest. It was given only by the bishop while he walked down the aisle returning to the sacristy after Mass, just as bishops still do today. Eventually this blessing was transferred to the altar before beginning the recession out of the sanctuary. From then on, it has been given by priests as well as bishops or abbots. The order of these ceremonies in the Mass was retained the way they came into existence and we understand them in that sequence. The priest dismisses us, then blesses us as we leave.

Sincerely in Christ,

Rev. Charles Van Vliet, FSSP

Pastor, Regina Caeli Parish