

Understanding the Mass

Part 23 in a series

We have received Holy Communion and have returned to our seats for a moment of silent prayer. But wait! Hey, where are those people going? Why are they leaving directly after receiving Communion? The Mass is not over!

A priest once told me that it truly breaks his heart to see people leaving directly after Communion. They honestly don't know what they are missing. They are leaving before they can receive God's blessing and usually it is so they can be first out of the parking lot! I am absolutely sure that there are legitimate reasons for leaving Mass early, but I would venture to guess that is not the case from the vast majority of those who do so each week. So please, reconsider before you leave Mass early. Don't deny yourself the multitude of graces that our Lord offers you in the full Mass. For those of you who do not leave early please do not judge those who do but instead, pray for them and ask Jesus to bless them.

The Prayer after Communion

The Communion Rite ends with a prayer said by our priest. We are all invited to stand and a final prayer is said, giving thanks for the Eucharist we have just received and praying that the sacrament will bear fruit in us. We all respond with "Amen", thus closing the Communion Rite that began with the Lord's Prayer.

The Concluding Rites

The priest, once again, asks that "The Lord be with you" and we respond again, "and with your spirit." We are again reminding the priest to be aware of the priestly grace within him for what he is about to do. The deacon will ask us to bow our heads to receive God's blessing.

The Mass ends just like it began; that is, under the sign of the cross and "in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit." The priest precedes this saying "may almighty God bless you." We are receiving our spiritual graces to help us carry out our Christian missionary duties for the week.

Ite missa est (Go, you are dismissed)

We receive our dismissal from the deacon (or priest). "Go forth, the Mass is ended" or "Go and announce the Gospel of the Lord" or "Go in peace, glorifying the Lord by your life", or just simply, "Go in peace." We respond with "Thanks be to God", thanking Him for the blessings we have just received in the Holy Mass.

The Closing Procession

The recessional hymn begins, (which we all sing joyously!) and the priest and deacon return to the altar and again reverence it with a kiss before moving down front and bowing to the altar for a final time. The ministers of the liturgy now exit along with the priest and deacon. You should stay in your pew until the last note of the closing hymn has been sung. It is at this time that the Mass has truly ended! As you leave your pew you again either bow or genuflect to the altar and tabernacle while making the sign of the cross. Bless yourself again with holy water as you leave, realizing you are protecting yourself from evil and reminding yourself of your baptism. You are now ready to re-enter the world and carry the Word of Christ with you!