

# Welcoming the New *Roman Missal*



## The Concluding Rite: Go In Peace

The final words of our Mass make up the Concluding Rite. It's just a few sentences. It consists of some brief announcements (if necessary), a greeting, a blessing, a dismissal by a priest or deacon, and the veneration of the altar (GIRM 90). A closing hymn is optional. How can something so brief be so important? Let's take a look at each part of the rite.

### ANNOUNCEMENTS

In the early Church, the worshippers would have conducted a brief business session, perhaps discussing charitable projects. Pope Leo the Great (440-461) placed announcements after the homily for a practical reason – the crowds would have been settled in place. In the late 7th century, the pope had “stational” Masses at different churches in Rome; at the end of each Mass, the deacon announced the time and place of the next papal Mass. Today, we may make a few important announcements, but a parish bulletin communicates most.

### GREETING

The priest greets us with the same words that have been used three times before during our celebration. Again, he quotes the greeting found in Scripture (Jgs 6:12; Ru 2:4,2, Chr 15:2 and Lk 1:28).

**Priest:** *The Lord be with you.*

**All:** *And with your spirit.*

### BLESSING

Just before Jesus ascended into heaven, he raised his arms and blessed his disciples. (Lk 24:50) A blessing calls down God's protection and it has long been part of Jewish and Christian prayer. We find evidence of a Lenten “prayer over the people” in some concluding rites of the 6th century. In the thirteenth century, we find more official formulas for blessings (within and outside Mass). At Trent, a blessing and a prayer before the blessing were included in the *Missal of Pius V* (1570).

Building on those traditions, we now have three options for the final blessing – a solemn blessing, a simple blessing and a prayer over the people with a simple blessing. When you are invited to “Bow your head and prayer for God's blessing,” you can be sure that a blessing with multiple invocations will follow. This Solemn Blessing usually references each member of the Trinity and after each invocation, you respond “Amen.”

### DISMISSAL

We find evidence of a formal dismissal as early as the fourth century, when the bishop would formally conclude an assembly. The Franks would have said “Let us bless the Lord” and respond with “and give him thanks.” In Rome, the phrase would have been *ite missa est* (“Go, it is the sending”) and the response would have been *Deo gratias* (“Thanks be to God”).

This latter exchange gives a hint of the importance of the entire Concluding Rite. From the word *missa* we get the words “dismissal” and “Mass.” From *missa* we also get “mission.” During the Mass we have been formed and fortified by the word, sacrament and each other to go out and *do* something – to bring the Good News to the rest of the world, to do good works and to live our baptismal calling. As the *Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy* reminds us, “The liturgy marvelously fortifies the faithful in their capacity to preach Christ” (CSL 2).

The actual dismissal is usually given by a deacon (who traditionally announces all directives during Mass). In his absence, the presider dismisses the people. At a recent synod in Rome, bishops and scholars encouraged the Holy Father to add new options for the dismissal. They reflect the nature of the mission on which we are all sent.

**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 with your life. OR*

*Go in peace. (Mk 5:34)*

**All:** *Thanks be to God*

### VENERATION OF THE ALTAR

The altar is a sign of Christ in our midst. At the dedication of a church, the altar is anointed with chrism oil to recall Christ (“the anointed one”). Bishops, priests and deacons venerate it with a kiss when they process in and out of the Church. Others may venerate it with a profound bow. We should, too, when we enter a church.

### CLOSING HYMN

Most assemblies will conclude with a final hymn, but it actually is not an official part of the Concluding Rite. When a hymn is used, its music accompanies our procession out of the church and its text usually emphasizes the important mission on which we are about to embark.

Yes, our Concluding Rite is brief. But it is rich in meaning and it is profound in its capacity to encourage us to live as disciples of Christ.

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