



Celebrating the Sacred Liturgy of the Mass: A Review of New Diocesan Norms—Part VII

Just as the Introductory Rites help us prepare for a fruitful celebration of the Eucharist and provide a dignified beginning to the Sacred Liturgy, the Concluding Rites bring our celebration to a fitting close and remind us that we are to go forth to bear fruit in the Lord's Name. The Concluding Rites provide a simple and dignified way for us to transition from our intimate encounter with Our Lord Jesus in the Holy Eucharist to our baptismal mission of carrying Christ to the world.

Following the Prayer After Communion, announcements may be made. Announcements should be brief and of concern to everyone. Details concerning dates and times of meetings or other important information which people will need to remember are better placed in the parish bulletin or posted in other ways. Likewise, announcements which are excessively long or which would detract attention from the celebration of the Eucharist which has just taken place are inappropriate.

Final Blessing

Following the announcements, the priest greets the people just as he did at the start of the Eucharistic Prayer: "The Lord be with you." The assembly responds, and the priest proceeds to the final blessing, for which there are three optional forms. The simple Trinitarian form, "May almighty God bless you, the Father, and the Son, and the Holy Spirit," is used most frequently. We affirm this blessing with our "Amen."

The other two forms are the solemn blessings and the prayers over the people, which are also concluded with the Trinitarian blessing. These two options are preceded by the invitation of the priest or deacon to bow and pray for God's blessings. The solemn blessing includes a three-part prayer by the priest and our response of "Amen" to each part.

There are several options for the priest's or deacon's words of dismissal. While the most simple is "Go in the peace of Christ," all of these formulas are intended not only to dismiss the congregation, but to send each member of the faithful on a mission. We are sent forth to carry on the mission of Christ to the world. Our dismissal from the Mass is to a life of charity, putting our love for others into practice each day. We go forth to praise God with

our whole lives as we have in the Eucharistic sacrifice of praise.

"Thanks be to God"

The final words of the Sacred Liturgy belong to the faithful. We respond with "Thanks be to God" for the gifts of life and all creation, for the most precious gifts of Christ's Body and Blood, and for the gift of our mission to transform the world. The priest (and deacon, if one is present) then kisses the altar, a symbol of Christ, just as the priest (and deacon, if one is present) did at the beginning of Mass. The priest and the other liturgical ministers in the procession reverence the tabernacle by genuflection (if present in the sanctuary) and depart. The cross bearer may make a slight bow of the head. If the tabernacle is not present in the sanctuary, the priest and other liturgical ministers in the process bow to the altar as a symbol of Christ and His sacrifice. It should be noted that the Book of the Gospels, which was brought in procession at the beginning of the Mass, is not included in the procession at the end of Mass. During the time the priest and ministers are leaving the sanctuary, a final hymn may be sung. It is also possible to have choir or instrumental music at this time. In the season of Lent it is also fitting to have the priest and other liturgical ministers in the procession, and then the assembly, depart in silence.

Reverence in the Sacred Liturgy

There are numerous small ways in which we show reverence throughout the Mass. We show respect for the Eucharist just celebrated through the way the Sacred Liturgy is concluded and lived throughout the week. It is also important to prepare for the Sacred Liturgy: spiritual preparation through prayer and charitable acts, the attitude with which we come to church each week, and even what we choose to wear.

While as Catholics we have a commitment to attend Sunday Mass, it should not be merely obligation which motivates our participation in the Sunday liturgy. Rather, it should be a sense of joy and profound gratitude which leads us to gather with our brothers and sisters in Christ each week to praise God and be nourished through His Word and Christ's Body and Blood in the Holy Eucharist.

Throughout the Sacred Liturgy we continue to show our love of God and reverence for the sacred in many ways. We recognize that we are gathered in a sacred place and let that fact guide our movements and behaviors. We join together in common postures, participation in common responses, by periods of reverent silence, and by speaking our words of praise and thanks clearly and purposefully. We also join also in common song. God desires to hear all the voices He created raised in hymns of praise, not only the voices of those who lead us in song.

Reverence in the Care of Sacred Objects and Elements for Mass

The sacred vessels that are used for the Body and Blood of our Lord are blessed and should be carried from place to place with reverence and not as every day objects. So too the Lectionary and the Book of the Gospels, as they contain the Word of God, are to be handled with great dignity. The bread and wine to be consecrated is also to be presented by members of the faithful in a manner that expresses the importance that these elements will have in the Liturgy of the Eucharist.

Reverence in Receiving Our Lord

The manner in which we receive Holy Communion is also very important not only as a sign of our own reverence toward the Blessed Sacrament, but also as a sign to others. We should process forward to receive the Body and Blood of Christ with the awesomeness of that gift in mind.

In coming forward in the communion procession, each communicant makes an act of reverence, such as a bow, before the Holy Eucharist they are about to receive. The communicant has the freedom to receive the Eucharist either on the tongue or in the hand. If we choose the latter, we should follow the instruction of St. Cyril of Jerusalem and use both hands—one beneath the other—to make a throne on which to receive our King. After receiving the Body of Christ, we step to the side and place this heavenly food in our mouths before moving away from the communion station. We don't walk away with the Body of Christ in hand.

In both options for reception, we respond with an attentive and firm "Amen" to the words of the priest, deacon, or extraordinary minister. Having received the Blood of Christ with the same reverence, we return to our place in the assembly conscious of the precious gift we have received.

Reverence in Liturgical Ministry

"Moreover, the wondrous mystery of the Lord's real presence under the Eucharistic species. . . is proclaimed in the celebration of Mass not only by means of the very words of consecration, by which Christ becomes present through transubstantiation, but also by that interior disposition and outward expression of supreme reverence and adoration in which the Eucharistic Liturgy is carried out." *General Instruction of the Roman Missal*, n. 3.

Those entrusted with particular liturgical ministries have the responsibility for enhancing the sense of reverence within the Sacred Liturgy. They show respect for God, for their fellow parishioners and their ministries in the manner which they prepare for and serve the assembly. All liturgical ministers should be mindful of the need for good training, developing their gifts of service, and wearing the proper befitting their ministry. Although we live in a casual society, we do dress

differently for what is important to us compared to how we dress for casual activity.

Readers and Psalmists are to show reverence through good preparation and careful proclamation of the Word of God entrusted to them. Cantors and liturgical musicians demonstrate reverence through leading and sustaining sacred song. Ushers are to maintain an attitude of reverence toward the sacred space and the faithful who gather for Sunday Liturgy. Altar servers should keep in mind that they are visible at all times. In addition to being alert to their role in the liturgy, they are also to remember how they exemplify the community at prayer.

Extraordinary ministers of Holy Communion are to exercise their ministry in as reverent a manner as possible. This includes holding the ciborium or chalice with reverence, being attentive to the Sacrament they distribute, and serving the faithful with pastoral charity and respect.

The assembly also shows its reverence for the sacred by their participation in the appropriate moments, by their sacred silence and by their attire.

Each of these simple practices demonstrate how we can well dispose ourselves to participating in and receiving the sacred mysteries we celebrate in the Liturgy of the Mass.