

# *Believe Celebrate Live* **THE EUCHARIST**

## Sending

### **The Concluding Rites**

The Latin saying *Lex orandi, lex credendi* tells us that the way we pray shapes what we believe. If this is so, what does our prayer at the Mass tell us? It acknowledges our need for change. Again and again we ask for greater unity, peace, and holiness, not only for ourselves, but for our Church and our world. We constantly strive to move forward; we do not congratulate ourselves on having in any way arrived. Instead, the closer we approach to the sacrament, the more we acknowledge our weakness, the more earnestly we ask for God's help. We ask God to look not on our sins, but on our faith. We likewise acknowledge our unworthiness to receive the Lord, but simultaneously express our belief that God can heal us.

### **Time for Meditation**

After the Communion procession, we return to our places. In the second century, St. Cyril of Jerusalem instructed the newly baptized that this was a time, while they were waiting for the priest's prayer after Communion, for them to give thanks to God, who had deemed them—and all of us—worthy to join in this mystery. A significant component of this time after the conclusion of the Communion procession is our time for silence.

We have experienced different kinds of silence in the course of the Mass—"head" and "heart" silences, you might say. There are praying silences, as at the penitential rite and the collects, and there are thinking silences, after the readings and the homily. The silence after Holy Communion is a time for adoration and thanksgiving, petition and self-offering. Countless saints have tried to put into words the richness of this silence in which we give thanks to God for the gift of the Son. St. Ignatius prayed: "Soul of Christ, sanctify me. Body of Christ, heal me. Blood of Christ, inebriate me. Water from the side of Christ, wash me. Passion of Christ, strengthen me. Good Jesus, hear me" (*Anima Christi*).

Another option we are offered is to sing a psalm, a canticle of praise, or a hymn together. In this way, the entire gathered assembly, the body of Christ that has just received the Body of Christ, expresses its thankfulness and praise in this sung sign of unity.

### **Prayer after Communion**

The Communion rite concludes with another prayer. This time it is not a prayer of thanksgiving; rather, we now ask for the fruits of the Eucharist. We pray that the sacrament may have an effect in our lives, that it will

- Help us bring the Lord's love to the world
- Give us new purpose as disciples
- Lead us to share Christ's eternal life
- Have the Lord touch our lives
- Teach us the way to everlasting glory
- Continue the saving work of the Eucharist
- Keep us single-minded in service to God and others

These prayers, together with the prayers over the gifts we heard just before the Eucharistic Prayer, offer a rich and diverse vision of what the Eucharist can do in our lives and in our communities, if we are aware and open to it. They are a marvelous source for prayer and reflection on the gift of Eucharist. You might well be amazed at what we are asking for, Sunday after Sunday!

### **Concluding Rites**

Just as special rites developed around the reception of Communion, so rites developed for the conclusion of the Mass. In the liturgy of the 1570 Missal, these rites were quite elaborate. They included venerating the altar, another ritual dialogue/greeting, dismissal, a prayer to precede the blessing, a second altar veneration, the blessing of the people, and the reading of the opening of St. John's Gospel. After 1884, there were additional prayers to be said, prescribed by Pope Leo XIII and added to by Pope St. Pius X, which included a series of Hail Marys, the Hail, Holy Queen, and invocations to Michael the Archangel

and the Sacred Heart of Jesus. Sometimes a long “Thanksgiving after Mass” would come after that!

In our renewed rite, things are quite a bit simpler. Following the prayer after Communion, announcements are made. Believe it or not, the announcements made at Mass have their own ancient heritage. Pope Leo the Great (d. 461) made announcements regularly at the conclusion of his homilies, reminding the faithful of fast days and announcing important liturgical celebrations in the coming week. No matter where the announcements occur at Mass, they should not be seen as an interruption of the liturgy, but rather as flowing directly out of it as we seek the strength to put the Eucharist in action. The announcements of events in the life of the parish often suggest ways we can carry our faith into a brand-new week.

## **Greeting and Blessing**

For a fourth time, the presider initiates a dialogue with the wish that the Lord will be with us. As at the other times this dialogue occurs, it indicates that something important is about to happen. We heard it at the beginning of Mass, at the beginning of the Gospel, and at the beginning of the Eucharistic Prayer. Why do we hear it again now? Isn't this the ending? Not at all! It's the beginning of the next part of the Mass, the part that lasts the longest: the part when we put what we have heard and received into action in our daily lives, the part when we “declare the wonderful deeds of God who has called us out of darkness into . . . wonderful light” (1 Peter 2:9).

The scriptures are filled with blessings as a part of leave-taking, including Luke's account of Christ's ascension (24:50–53). The end of the Mass follows the same pattern. The priest gives the blessing, and we all make the sign of the cross. We are blessed and sent. Indeed, in Latin the words of the dismissal are *Ite, missa est*, which literally means “Go, you are sent.” We are all sent forth to carry out the mission of Christ and his church, sent to proclaim good news, to seek and bring justice and peace, to be a source of healing. We accept this commission as a gift, with words of gratitude that echo our responses elsewhere in the Mass: “Thanks be to God!”

The Mass is our greatest prayer; as Father Jeremy Driscoll says, the Church “exists to pray it, and she

comes into being by praying it” (Driscoll, *What Happens at Mass*, p. 70). Yet it is what we do outside of Mass that also determines the genuineness of the offering we make at the altar each Sunday. “We cannot delude ourselves: by our mutual love and, in particular, by our concern for those in need we will be recognized as true followers of Christ. This will be the criterion by which the authenticity of our Eucharistic celebrations is judged” (Pope John Paul II, *Mane Nobiscum Domine* #28). All who are called to the Lord's tables of word and Eucharist are called to be peacemakers and justice bearers, not only on a grand scale, but in the ordinary encounters of our daily lives.

## **Procession**

It is interesting to note that for this moment of the Mass the *General Instruction of the Roman Missal (GIRM #90)* never uses the term recessional. “Recessional” implies that we simply go back where we started. That's exactly what we don't want to do after our celebration of the Eucharist! We have prayed that the celebration will transform us, and not only us, but the world we live in. So it's good that we always process: we always go forward. We are led once again by the cross as we depart “to do good works, while praising and blessing God” (*GIRM #90d*). We stream out to live the word we have heard and the sacrament we have received, in many different places and many different ways.

## **Reverencing the Altar**

Before the priest departs he reverences the altar once again. This time it is a gesture of farewell. It looks back upon the entire celebration, yet anticipates the next time the baptized will gather. In the early church, the liturgy of Antioch even included a wonderful prayer that the priest would say privately at this moment; one in which we can join, in spirit at least, as we depart each Sunday: “Rest in peace, holy altar of the Lord. . . . May the Lord grant me to see you in the assembly of the firstborn which is in heaven; in this covenant, I place my trust. . . . Rest in peace, holy altar, table of life, and beseech our Lord Jesus Christ for me so that I may not cease to think of you henceforth and forever and ever. Amen” (quoted in Deiss, *The Mass*, p. 103).