

Prayer After Communion and the Final Blessing & Dismissal

The Mass In Slow Motion is a series on the Mass explaining the meaning and history of what we do each Sunday. This series of flyers is an attempt to add insight and understanding to our celebration of the Sacred Liturgy. This series will follow the Mass in order beginning with The Gathering Rite through The Final Blessing and Dismissal, approximately 25 volumes. Previous editions are available via the rectory office or our website: www.hscchurch.org.

The Prayer after Communion—The Instructions in the Roman Missal say of the time following the reception of Holy Communion: *After communion, the priest and people may spend some time in silent prayer. If desired, a hymn, psalm, or other song of praise may be sung by the entire congregation.* After this time the priest and people stand and he summons them to attend to the prayer which concludes the communion rite. He says, “Let us pray.” Generally, there is no lengthy pause here since it is presumed that all have just been praying in the period after receiving communion. Have you?

The Missal describes the purpose of the prayer after communion: *In the prayer after communion, the priest petitions for the effects of the mystery just celebrated and by their acclamation, Amen, the people make the prayer their own.*

Thus, we do not see Holy Communion as remote from our life, but we ask that the mystery of the dying, rising and ascending of Jesus Christ have an effect in our lives. We pray that the Holy Communion we have just received will have a transformative effect in our lives, truly changing us and making us more holy, more like Christ, whom we have received. St. Augustine once said, “Christian, become what you receive.”



History—The post communion praise (or silence) and prayer stretch back to the early exhortations of the Church Fathers. St. Cyril in his ancient Jerusalem Catechesis instructs the clergy to admonish the faithful to make a thanksgiving after communion. St. John Chrysostom points sharply at those who cannot wait for the Eucharist to be over but, like Judas, hurry away instead of singing a hymn of praise with Jesus and his true disciples (De bapt. Christi, c. 4). In some of the ancient Eastern Liturgies the deacon gave an elaborate instruction for those assembled to rise and give thanks: *Having partaken of the precious Body and Blood of Christ, let us give thanks to him who has made us worthy to partake of these sacred mysteries, and let us plead that it not redound to our fault, but to our salvation, to health of soul and body, to preservation of piety, to remission of sins, and life everlasting.* Something very similar is still said in most Eastern liturgies today and contrasts sharply with the more sober Western, or Latin rite wherein the celebrant says, merely, “Let us pray.” But in both the East and West, after this invitation, all the faithful stood and were led in a prayer and act of thanksgiving. This practice is very ancient. Over the early centuries a collection of post communion prayers developed, all with the same basic theme: a grateful glance at the gifts (sacrament) received and the wish that it be efficacious in our life in some particular way. All the congregation assent by saying, “Amen.”

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Concluding Rite—The concluding rite consists of: the priest's greeting and blessing, which on certain days and occasions is expanded and expressed in the prayer over the people or another more solemn formulary. It also includes the dismissal of the assembly, which sends each member back to doing good works, while praising and blessing the Lord.

History—It would seem, that in the earlier days in the Church, the blessing by the celebrant was more elaborate than it usually is today. Even today, there are times today when the priest will often have several petitions before giving the final blessing. This is usually reserved for special feasts, though it can be done at any mass. After each petition people respond by saying *AMEN*. In the ancient Church the use of these added blessings were more common. Over time the blessing came to be simplified, in the western Church by the priest simply saying, “The Lord be with you”, followed by the people’s response, “And with your spirit.” The priest then gave the simple Trinitarian blessing, “May almighty God bless you, the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit.” As already noted, today there are some options to add back the petitionary prayers, as was done in the ancient Church. There is evidence that this final blessing, with the sign of the cross, was not given from the altar or the chair in the ancient liturgy, but was given by the Bishop or celebrant as they processed down the aisle. Bishops still often do this today.

The Dismissal—The final word of the liturgy is said by the Deacon, if he is present, or by the celebrant. Most of us today recognize this instruction simply as, “The mass has ended go in peace.” This is a loose translation of the Latin which states more tersely “*Ite, missa est*” which strictly translated says, “Go, there is a dismissal.” This Latin expression was a common way of ending gatherings in ancient Rome and it was simply taken into the Church as a way of indicating the Mass was concluded. In the Eastern Church, the concluding dismissal was less terse, since the celebrant or deacon declared, “Let us go forth in peace!” And the people responded, “In the name of the Lord!” This is still done today in the Eastern Church.



Pastoral Note: The dismissal should not be seen simply as a concluding phrase. The people of God are not just being told things are finished here you may go home. Rather, they are being commissioned to go forth and bring Jesus Christ, whom they have heard and received, into the world. In one sense, this final instruction is one of the most important, since it reminds the faithful who have assembled to go forth and evangelize in obedience to Christ who said Go and make disciples of all the nations (Matthew 28:19). The faithful have not been instructed and fed merely for their own sake, but indeed, for the whole world. Thus, the final word of the liturgy is, “Go!” Will you?