

DISMISSAL AND MISSION: IS ANYTHING LEFT BEHIND?

by Eliot Kapitan

I remember daily dismissals from grade school. My classmates and I would rush through the doors, make our hasty good-byes so we could get home, change our clothes, and go outside to do what we considered the important work of the day – play until we were called in for dinner. The dismissal bell was the signal to leave behind the desk with its work until the next school day.

HOW THE CHURCH PRAYS

There is a little more dignity in the dismissals from the Church's liturgy. During some Masses, children are dismissed for a separate Liturgy of the Word. Catechumens are always dismissed from Mass after the homily to continue breaking open the Word of God. All are dismissed at the end of Mass. The deacon (or the priest) sings or says one of these options:

- A. **Go in the peace of Christ.**
- B. **The Mass is ended, go in peace.**
- C. **Go in peace to love and serve the Lord.**

The people answer: **Thanks be to God.**

To end Evening Prayer or Morning Prayer in the Liturgy of the Hours, the presiding minister sings or says: **Go in peace.** The people answer: **Thanks be to God.**

WHAT THE CHURCH BELIEVES BY PRAYING

There is much more import in the dismissals during the Church's liturgy. These are more than mere good-byes. As is the case with other ritual dialogues, these exchanges help believers recall important realities.

ONE. The word common to each proclamation is "peace". This recalls the Easter greetings of the Lord, "Peace be with you" and "Do not be afraid."

TWO. This peace is more than a state of tranquility existing among believers. It is, in fact, an acknowledgement of the truth – resurrected life transcends the ordinary.

THREE. The assembly's response admits that the peace we share, the peace in which we live, is due solely to God. We are reminded that dismissal from Mass is "grateful praise for encountering the risen Christ in the Church's worship" [*Introduction to the Order of Mass: A Pastoral Resource of the Bishops' Committee on the Liturgy*, no. 147].

WHAT THE CHURCH LEARNS BY BELIEVING

There is a lot more “what is next” in the dismissals during the Church’s liturgy. They do not indicate an ending. They call for, they demand, that something more should happen. The suggestions found in our ritual books open up our understanding of what is to take place.

In the Introduction to the *Lectionary for Masses with Children*, no. 8, we find this text that may be used in these or similar words:

**My dear children,
you will now go to hear God’s word,
to praise God in song,
and to reflect on the wonderful things
God has done for us.
We will await your return
so that together we may celebrate the
eucharist.**

The *Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults*, no. 67, gives this suggested text to conclude the Rite of Acceptance into the Order of Catechumens. It is the first of what will be many dismissals of the unbaptized from Mass before the profession of faith and general intercessions:

**My dear friends, this community
now sends you forth to reflect
more deeply upon the word of
God which you have shared with
us today. Be assured of our
loving support and prayers for
you. We look forward to the day
when you will share fully in the
Lord’s Table.**

This same text is repeated in the three scrutinies and the two presentations that usually occur in Lent [RCIA, nos. 155, 162, 169, 176, and 183].

Dismissals, especially when the assembly “goes in peace”, are biblical ways of speaking. They remind us that although some thing, some action is ending, there is more. We are called to do next what good Christians do: Liturgy of the Word with children, continue to break open God’s word, or live as Christian until the next Mass.

RESOURCES FOR FURTHER STUDY

Jerry Galipeau. *We Send You Forth: Dismissals for the RCIA*. Franklin Park: World Library Publications, 2005. This book provides suggestions for every Sunday plus additional solemnities and feasts.

Peter Mazar and Robert Piercy. *A Guide to the Lectionary for Masses with Children*. Chicago: Liturgy Training Publications, 1993. This book offers many questions and answers as well as other helps for using the 1992 edition of this lectionary currently in use in the Diocese of the United States of America.

Lawrence J. Johnson. *The Mystery of Faith: A Study of the Structural Elements of the Order of Mass*. Washington: Federation of Diocesan Liturgical Commissions, 2005.