

THE GATES OF HEAVEN ARE LIGHTLY LOCEK- WEEK 11
THE CONCLUDING RITE

- I. The Concluding Rite sends the congregation forth to bring the presence of Christ to the world.
 - A. Jesus, after appearing again to the disciples after the Resurrection, sent them forth to evangelize the world, promising them His presence and the power of the Holy Spirit. See Matt. 28:18-20; Mark 16:15-20; Luke 24:44-53; John 20:19-23 (more specifically for the Apostles as the first priests); Acts 1:1-12. Then, at Pentecost, the early Christians received the fullness of the Holy Spirit and began the evangelization of the world. See Acts 2.
 - B. Likewise, after experiencing the re-presentation of the death of Christ, being in the presence of the risen Christ, and receiving Him, the faithful are sent forth to bring the Gospel to the world. Thus, while it is a relatively short part of the Mass, the Concluding reflects a crucial aspect of our faith, the call to evangelize the world.
 - C. There are three main parts to the Concluding Rite: (1) the priest's greeting and blessing; (2) the dismissal; and (3) the reverence of the altar. There may also be announcements before the blessing. General Instructions to the Roman Missal 90.
- II. The blessing harkens back to greeting at the beginning of Mass and gives a final outpouring of grace.
 - A. The priest greets the people here, as he began the Mass, by saying "The Lord be with you." This phrase was a common way in which St. Paul ended his letters, entrusting the people he was addressing to the grace of God and calling them to live out this grace. See 1 Cor. 1:16; 2 Cor. 13:13; 1 Thess. 5:27, 2 Thess. 3:18; 1 Tim. 6:21; 2 Tim. 4:22; Phil 2:5. (This phrase was also part of the angel Gabriel's first address to Mary, see Luke 1:28, but at this point in the Mass, the emphasis is more on sending the people forth into the world.)
 - C. The people respond "and with your spirit." As in the Introductory Rite and before the Gospel, that response is both a courteous reply and a prayer that Jesus be with the priest in all ways. See Ruth 2:4; Gal. 6:18; Phil. 4:23; 1 Thess. 5:23; Philemon 25. And, here as before, there is also an emphasis on renewing the spirit of his ordination. See 2 Tim. 1:7.
 - D. The Mass, and the liturgies generally, end with a blessing. This blessing is especially fitting at the Mass, for Jesus blessed His disciples just before ascending into heaven and called upon them to make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. See Matt 28:18-20; Luke 24:50-53.
 1. The most common blessing is "May almighty God bless you, the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit." This blessing fittingly brings to a conclusion the Mass that began by invoking the Trinity with the sign of the Cross.
 2. There may also be a solemn blessing, which begins, "Bow for the blessing." Partially, this idea of bowing comes from a common notion of reverencing God to receive His blessing, give Him thanks, and walk with Him toward a better future. See Duet. 26:10; Ps. 138:1-3; Micah 6:6-8. Solemn blessings then involve a three-fold prayer that reflects the season or the sacrament being celebrated. The blessing then conclude with, "And may the blessing of almighty God, the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit come down upon you and remain with you for ever." Those words reflect the blessing Moses promised for those who do the will of God. See Duet. 28:1-15.

2. The apostolic blessing of a bishop includes a dialogue. The bishop says, “Blessed is the name of the Lord” and the people respond “now and forever.” Then the bishop says, “Our help is in the name of the Lord” and the people respond, “Who made heaven and earth.” The first declaration and response is from the prayer of Daniel as he was about to interpret King Nebuchadnezzar’s dream, based upon God’s revelation. See Dan. 2:20. Likewise, we are giving thanks to God for opening our hearts and minds to the mysteries of heaven through the Mass. The second declaration and response is from Psalms 121 and 124, pilgrim psalms that celebrate God’s guidance of His people through the dangers of life. See Ps. 121:2, 124:8.

II. The priest then sends the congregation forth with a commissioning.

A. The oldest Latin conclusion was, “Ite, missa est,” which means, “Go, it is sent forth.” The life of Christ, and the graces of the Mass generally, are sent forth with the faithful. God sent forth His word to heal the nations. See Ps. 107:20; Isaiah 55:11. And Jesus sent forth His apostles at the Last Supper and again at His Ascension to bring His presence to the world. See John 17:18; Matt. 28:18-20; Mark 16:15-20; Luke 24:44-53; Acts 1:1-12. The Mass renews that commissioning here and now.

B. In both Latin and English, there are now there are three options for this commissioning.

1. The first option in English is, “Go forth; the Mass is ended.” These words reflect the final commissioning of Jesus to His disciples that they go forth into the world to bring the gospel to all nations. See Matt, 28:19.

2. The second option is, “Go and announce the Gospel.” This commissioning is similar to the words that Jesus used during His public ministry when sending the Twelve Apostles, and then the seventy-two disciples to towns and villages ahead of Him. See Matt. 10:7; Luke 9:2, 10:9-11. We are meant to hear again the words of Christ calling us again to bring the Gospel to every town and place.

3. The third option is, “Go in peace, glorifying the Lord by your life.” This commissioning reflects: (1) the desire to live in the peace of God; and (2) the calling to live in a manner worthy of receiving the Lord within ourselves. Jesus would sometimes say to a person, “Go in peace” when he had granted a miracle. See Luke 7:50, 8:48; see also 1 Sam. 1:17. We have received this greatest of miracles, the life of Christ within us and therefore have a peace that the world cannot give. See John 14:27; Col. 3:15. Building upon that peace of God, we are meant to give Him glory in all ways. As St. Paul says, “So whether you eat or drink, or whatever you do, do all to the glory of God.” 1 Cor. 10:31.

C. The response, “Thanks be to God” expresses once again a gratitude at receiving the glories of the Mass and God’s calling to share them with others. See 2 Cor. 2:14-15, 9:11-15.

III. The priest then reverences the altar, reflecting both wonder at the glory of God and the love of Christ for His Church. See, e.g., Luke 7:36-38 (the penitent woman kissing the feet of Jesus); Is. 6:1 (the magnificence of the throne of God); Dan. 7:9-10; Rev. 4:1. Eph. 5:32-33; Rev. 11:1; 21:1-2, 9-10. Then the priest, the deacon, the altar servers, and sometimes others serving at the Mass genuflect before the tabernacle; or, if there is no tabernacle, they bow before the altar. They then process out of the church, symbolizing the Church going into the world.