

GOING OUT AS GOD'S PEOPLE

The Sending Rite....an ending or a beginning?...

Ite missa est, (Latin) meaning "Go, we are sent forth." "Go, it is the sending (dismissal)"

Going forth is a brief but essential part of worship. Like a Mobius strip, in which mission and worship flow into and out of one another, this final action links worship as participating in God's mission and engaging in that mission in the world.

Roman Catholic writer Gregory Augustine Pierce argues that the dismissal is the most important part of the mass. "When we are sent forth from the Mass," he says, "sent forth to go out and try again to help transform the world along the lines that God intended and Jesus preached." The dismissal is thus related to mission. Pierce reminds us that the word "mass" comes from the ecclesiastical Latin phrase used for the dismissal of the assembly, *Ite missa est*, meaning "Go, we are sent forth." Pierce then speculates that, "Sometime in church history, some people thought this was an important enough part of the liturgy to name the entire thing after it." It is interesting to note that the Roman Catholic Church continues to define "Mass" as the central act of worship, which culminates in celebration of the sacrament of the Eucharist. However, by expanding the definition of "mass" to make it synonymous with the entire service only serves to distort its true meaning.

Clayton Schmidt, another liturgical scholar of Lutheran training, agrees that the final moment of worship is not a dismissal, but a sending. He says that a "dismissal" at the close of worship acts like an adjournment, where the worship activities are suspended until the assembly comes together to worship again, as we do from one Sunday to the next. In contrast, however, he makes the point that "sending is the primary element of preparation" for the service for which we are commissioned during the week. By being once again refreshed with the spirit of Christ, (who is proven to be the "master" servant), we are beckoned - invited- to draw even closer to the Lord, by following and walking in his footsteps, and trying our best to serve others as He has served us.

In the Iona Abby Worship Book, the final rubric of the daily morning service propels the assembly into action. For those staying at the Abby, the relationship between worship and work is further underscored by the scheduling of daily chores immediately after the morning service. These tasks for the "common good", may include such mundane acts as sweeping floors and cleaning bathrooms, and are done for the benefit of all who live within the Abby's four walls. No act is too small, too unimportant, or too "beneath" one's status, and reminiscent of the Maundy Thursday foot washing:

If I then, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also ought to wash one another's feet. For I have given you an example, that you should do as I have done to you. Most assuredly, I say to you, a servant is not greater than his master; nor is he who is sent greater than he who sent him. If you know these things, blessed are you if you do them.

The Announcements

Announcements can be read after the peace or before the dismissal., depending on their nature. But wherever they are inserted during the service, they are an important opportunity to once again relate worship and mission in the world. The best announcements to have at the end of the service would be ones pertaining to the church's outreach opportunities and plans, while more personal announcements about any specific members of the assembly would be best made known after the Peace.

The Blessing

While it is customary in most places for the presider to invoke a blessing upon the assembly, it is in fact optional. The BCP indicates that the presider may bless the people and there is no formula in Rite II, although the formulas in Rite I can be adapted to contemporary language.

The omission of the Blessing in Rite II may signal a recognition that it is a vestige of an outdated hierarchical and clerical world view and an acknowledgment that, following Eucharist, which is the greatest blessing possible, it is simply superfluous.

If the Blessing is given, the presider may trace the cross over the assembly at the naming of the Trinity. At the same time, the members of the assembly cross themselves or bow profoundly.

The Dismissal

For many centuries, the Eucharist ended with a post-communion prayer and dismissal. However, this changed dramatically when the dismissal was discarded in the first English Prayer Book of 1549. This exclusion became standard Anglican practice and remained in effect until the revisions of the last 50 years, with the approval of the Book of Common Prayer 1979. This new version included four options for the obligatory dismissal:

1. Let us go forth in the name of Christ.
2. Go in peace to love and serve the Lord
3. Let us go forth into the world, rejoicing in the power of the Spirit.
4. Let us bless the Lord.

Following the reflective reassurance of the blessing, the dismissal is a sharp change in attitude and tempo. At the Sunday Liturgy, where there is a final hymn during which the presider exits the altar, the dismissal can be given after the hymn, right at the main doors. It should be proclaimed boldly by a deacon, (since, historically, the deacons of the Church were called to serve in the world,) or liturgical lay person, and with expectation. The assembly is charged to take their knowledge of the gospel, the good news of Jesus Christ, and share it beyond the walls of the Church. To ensure that the assembly responds in unison and with 'one voice', the preferred (desired) response is simply "Thanks be to God".

Sending Hymn

There is no rubric or "additional direction" that forbids a closing hymn after the blessing or dismissal in the BCP. Many congregations insert one. Marion Hatchett writes that the Rubrics Committee did not mention a closing or recessional hymn because it thought that the rite would be more effective without one. The post communion prayers all suggest an immediate movement into the world. "Send us now into the world," they say, and "now, Father, send us out to do the work you have given us to do." Then comes the dismissal, which, by definition, sends the Church forth. Hatchett writes that the action – the leaving – should come immediately without further words and songs. When the Rubrics Committee did not put in a rubric allowing a closing hymn, they imagined that there would not be one, yet closing hymns are very common, and Hatchett saw them as contrary to the solid theology of the Eucharist that informed the rubrics: The Eucharist sends us out, so the rite should reflect that.

Postlude

Post Worship Service Activities

Going Forth in the Name of Christ / Administering Communion to Parish members unable to Attend the Service

Another key element of "being sent into the world" is the administration of Holy Communion to those who are unable to attend an in-person service due to illness or infirmity. Besides the parish priest, a deacon or Lay Eucharistic Minister has the training and certification to administer these holy gifts, which serve to unite the shut-ins with the members of the assembly. The priest can choose to ask the church's eucharistic ambassadors to approach the altar at the end of the service, where he hands them the communion elements, and then commissions them to share them with

Going Forth in the Name of Christ / Hospitality after the Dismissal

While it is always appropriate to leave after worship (after all, we have just been sent out into the world), we must not overlook the opportunity that presents itself for fellowship and Christian formation as vital aspects of our life together.

The Eucharist that has just been shared is not a personal devotion but rather a communal meal. Although aspects of personal devotion will always remain, the Eucharist is primarily the joyous assembly of the community of faith around the table of the Lord.

Hospitality after the service is essential, for without it, we deny all that we have said and done while celebrating the Eucharist. It is the first opportunity we have to welcome strangers, who may have walked through our doors for the very first time, as well as interacting with regular members of our own assembly, with warm words of welcome and/or words of concern for those facing troubling and challenging circumstances.

Going Forth in the Name of Christ / Christian Formation

During or after this shared time of hospitality, an opportunity to strengthen our Christian Formation, in the form of an educational adult forum, can be held. Education is the

means through which the members of the assembly can learn more about the gospel context of fellowship and service for which they have just been commissioned.

Scholars Alan and Eleanor Krieder emphasize the importance of education and formation in our contemporary post-Christendom context:

“In a Christendom context, people learned the Christian story and rudimentary Christian ethics by a process of osmosis, from parents and the wider culture, as well as from the church. But in post-Christendom, these sources of learning have largely dried up. Today, people are catechized by the global culture industries and by advertisers who prey without ceasing on our susceptibilities. If outsiders are to become followers of Jesus in post-Christendom, they need to engage in a process of deconstructing old assumptions and learning new ways of thinking and behaving. If they are to learn the elements of God’s mission – love

of God in Christ; love of the neighbor; love of God's reconciling work (including love of the enemy); and love of creation – they will need the support of the wider Christian family and of companions on the road.”

By the second century, even though infant children of believers were now being baptized, it was still the norm for adult believers to go through the baptismal process. These converts underwent a period of catechumenal teaching, whose intent was to foster both a change of belief and behavior, leading to their baptism and belonging in the Christian community. But participation in this formation process did not simply end with their initiation into the Christian community, but continued well after their acceptance.

In the same fashion, our modern-day church offers opportunities for those seeking to receive and build a deeper understanding of the Eucharist and a closer relationship with God the Father, Son and Holy Spirit, by offering Adult Education classes, whose purpose is to continue nurturing the process and to satisfy the spiritual longings of our souls, as we mature in our spiritual path and life-long journey.

In closing, Richard Giles in his book *Creating Uncommon Worship*, writes, “At the beginning of the third Christian millennium, we again need to learn those simple steps by which our spiritual ancestors took giant leaps. Let us begin by re-learning how to “make eucharist”, and let us pray that, from our own encounter with God's transforming power in the glory and joy of the eucharistic assembly, we ourselves may become agents of transformation and reconciliation in a broken and hungry world.”