

## Living the Mass: What It Means to "Go in Peace"

The words "Go in peace" are not just nice words to nod our heads to because we agree with them in theory. To literally "go in peace" is an incredible challenge. As we reflect on what these words mean, we begin to realize just how transforming the Mass is supposed to be. We begin to see that, because of our baptism as Christians, we are called to be different. We are called to be holy—in the words of Peter's epistle, a people "set apart." We begin to realize that to "go in peace" means much more than to leave with a good feeling. It means that we leave church with the intention of making peace happen in our personal lives and in what happens around us. The Mass proclaims that we "go in peace to love and to serve the Lord." We are not just humanists who feel compelled to be nice to our brothers and sisters only. The peacemaking we do is in the name of the Lord. Our Lord is not some remote or punishing God, nor is he some pantheistic deity who is hiding in the bushes somewhere. Jesus Christ became flesh, lived among us, died for our sins, rose from the dead, and opens the gates of heaven for all of us. In the creed, we proudly proclaim our faith in a triune God—God who creates us, God who lived among us and redeems us, and God whom we experience in the depth of our being. This is the God we love and serve and take with us when we leave church. This is the God in whose name we are sent. God's very nature is relational, and so we find ourselves in relationship with God. That is why we are told to go in peace to love and serve the Lord. We all know that love is more than just words; it moves into actions.

The Mass urges us to love God by acting against injustice, violence, war, prejudice—anything and everything that gets in the way of our loving one another. We must also do the small, everyday things that strengthen our relationships with those around us. And we are also responsible to act as part of the human family. On a global level our love calls us to fulfill responsibilities that we cannot ignore. We go forth to act as priests, making Jesus present to the world. We go forth to act as prophets, speaking on behalf of the oppressed and bringing hope to those in despair. We go forth to act as kings, serving and protecting the vulnerable and providing for the needs of others. We go forth recognizing that Jesus is present not only in the bread and wine that we have just received but also in "the poor, the sick, and the imprisoned" (*Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 1373). And finally, we are told not only to love the Lord but also to "serve the Lord." We cannot leave church with our own agenda, expecting to do things our own way. We serve our God and not ourselves. It must be God's path we take, God's words we speak, and God's actions we perform. It must be God's will that is done. After all, shortly before communion we prayed the words "thy will be done" in the Lord's Prayer. We are sent forth, with God's blessing, to do God's bidding. Again, this is not an easy task, because to serve the Lord means to serve our neighbor. To serve the Lord is something that we do not in church but in our homes, neighborhoods, and workplaces. To make matters more challenging, God's will quite often runs counter to our human instincts, no matter how noble we might think them to be. God's will can also be maddeningly mysterious. This is where faith comes in. It takes faith to serve the Lord. It takes great faith to respond in a way counter to what others expect, in a way that seemingly isolates us, making us look different or strange. In those times of painful loneliness we need to remember that we are not alone.

The Mass strengthens our faith by bringing us into communion with Jesus and our brothers and sisters. Jesus Christ, whom we took into our hearts and souls in the Eucharist, walks with us. And all those with whom we shared a sign of Christ's peace are fighting the same battle, struggling in the same way. The Mass helps us to overcome isolation and empowers us to recognize that so many others, because of their faith, are in the fight with us. And, "If God is for us, who is against us?" (Romans 8:31). Given all the above, when we are sent forth to "go in peace to love and serve the Lord," our only

response must be a resounding "Thanks be to God." When we say these words, we are doing more than thanking God for what we have experienced in the past hour or so. Likewise, we are not thanking God that Mass is over, as relieved parents of a two-year-old who just made it through the liturgy with Cheerios, picture books, and a minimum of trips to the bathroom might be inclined to do. When we say, "Thanks be to God," we are thanking God for the faith that brought us to the Mass and for all those with whom we have shared that faith: from the saints to our deceased loved ones, all of whom we have remembered in the Mass. For two thousand years, people of faith have gathered to celebrate the Eucharist. We continue to do so today, united with them all. Most important, when we say, "Thanks be to God," we are showing gratitude for the trust that God places in us to be Christ's loving presence in the world. We call ourselves Christians. Christ lives and works in and through us, the people of God. We are happy to be called to the Lord's Supper, which prepares us to "go in peace to love and serve the Lord." When we say, "Thanks be to God," we are thanking God profoundly and joyfully that the Mass is over and that we can leave church with renewed power to make God's love and peace real in our individual circles of influence. It's as if we are runners at the starting line after months of training, waiting for the race to finally begin. Everything has led up to this moment. Now we will give it our best effort. We'll see what we can do, and we'll be ready for whatever comes our way. God has freed us from serving other "masters" that we have allowed into our lives. We are free to do what we were truly created to do: love and serve the Lord, our God.

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