

# Liturgy Sends Us into the World

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So often when I visited my grandmother, she would be sitting in the kitchen next to the window with a prayer book in hand. She prayed often and always near that window. Her lips appeared to be fixed on prayer, but her eyes were focused on the world outside that window. Grandma was a faithful Catholic who taught us that prayer moved her to care for the world around her. She saw the world through the eyes of God.

Like my grandmother, the liturgy teaches us that prayer moves us to care for the world around us. Like that window in Grandma's house, the liturgy helps us to see the world and each other through God's eyes.

In the Mass, ordinary things in our world are treated with utmost reverence, books are lifted high, furniture is kissed, bread and wine are blessed. We too are blessed, incensed, cleansed with holy water, lathered with sacred oil, and fed with the Body and Blood of Christ. We are loved into mission, a mission that begins when we gather.

When we gather for liturgy, we see parishioners from every walk of life. Some were born in other countries, some eat different foods than we do or have different political views. We gather as young and not so young, as corporate CEOs and as day laborers. Our very gathering helps us to move beyond ourselves by witnessing the rich tapestry of humanity that God has chosen.

When we celebrate the Liturgy of the Word, we hear God revealed as lover of the poor, salvation of the sinner, liberator of the enslaved, and refuge of the broken. God's justice and God's mercy are woven throughout the Word. In Hebrew, the word for "word" is *dabar*. *Dabar* also means act. The proclamation of the living Word of God, then, is our call to act. We who participate in God's *dabar* are likewise called to love the poor, to liberate the enslaved, and so on.

When we enact the Liturgy of the Eucharist, we remember the Paschal Lamb who died so that others could live. We who participate in this sacred meal are called to share in the death and Resurrection of Jesus. As cohosts at the table of divine hospitality, we too are mandated to give ourselves fully for the sake of others.

The last words we hear at Mass are:

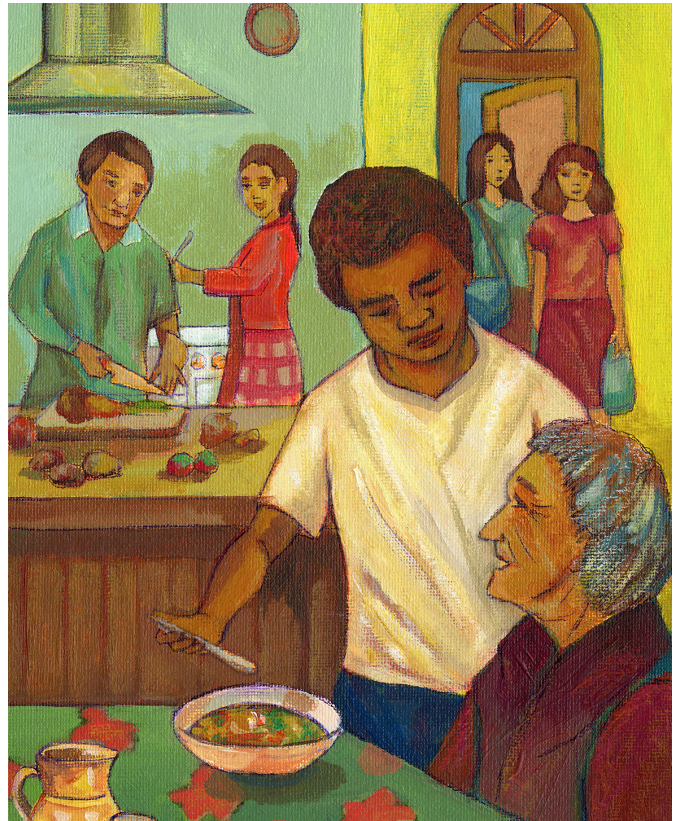
Go forth, the Mass is ended,

or

Go and announce the Gospel of the Lord,

or

Go in peace, glorifying the Lord with your life.



Christians are dismissed from the liturgy to act as Christ in the world, serving the needs of others.

The original Latin dismissal for Mass, *ite missa est*, literally means "Go, you are sent!" There is an urgency in these words.

It is the same urgency that empowered the women in the accounts of the Gospel who discovered the empty tomb to run with the Good News of the Resurrection.

We are called, not merely to come to church, nor to be entertained by nice stories, or beautiful rituals, nor to indulge in the satisfaction of a sanctified banquet. We are called as people of the Resurrection to continue the work of Christ in the world, to run with the Good News.

Alexander Schmemmann, the Orthodox theologian, wrote that the liturgy "is not an escape from the world, rather it is the arrival at a vantage point from which we can see more deeply into the reality of the world." Perhaps this is why Grandma prayed near that window. She understood the wisdom of our Jewish ancestors who said, "Never pray in a room without windows."