

SOLEMNITY OF THE MOST HOLY BODY AND BLOOD OF CHRIST “C”
JUNE 5/6, 2010

The last words we hear the deacon or priest proclaim in every Mass are: “The Mass is ended. Go in peace” or a variant on them. To which, some people looking at their watches heartily respond: “Thanks be to God.”

Some years ago as I was greeting people after Mass a gentleman stopped and commented: “Father, I’m sure glad the Mass is over. I’ve got a foursome out at the country club I need to get to.” To which I said, “If you’ve got a second may I ask you a question?” “Sure” he said, “but make it quick.” “So, how are you planning to take the Mass with you to the country club?” “What?” he said looking dumbfounded. “Mass is over.” “My point exactly,” I said. “The ceremony is over, but now the Mass must be you.” “I’ve never heard that” he said. “Well, that’s what your ‘Thanks be to God’ committed you to being” I replied. .

Today’s feast in celebration of the sacrament of the Most Holy Eucharist, originated in Belgium and became a universal feast of the Church in 1246. Later in that same century the first Eucharistic procession in conjunction with the feast appeared in Germany. Both have come down to us today. Today’s feast, and procession with the Blessed Sacrament are **not** primarily occasions of Catholic triumphalism, of rubbing the reality of the true presence of Christ in the Holy Eucharist into the faces of other Christians or non-believers. What our celebration **is** about is thanking God for the gift of divine life we receive through faith in Jesus, made present again and again through his act of instituting this sacrament of his once and for all sacrificial death and resurrection at the Last Supper in the sacramental symbols of ordinary bread and wine **and** our transformation into him through our consumption of them and the consequent call to continue his saving mission in the world today.

The Latin language form of the dismissal proclaimed by the deacon or priest in is: “*Ite missa est.*” “*Missa*” gives us both the English nouns “*Mass*”, our common name for the celebration of the Holy Eucharist, and also originates, the noun “*mission.*” A

literal translation of “Ite missa est” is: “**Go. The Mass is.**” The liturgical ceremony is ended. Now the Mass **IS US!**

Today’s Scripture readings drive home this point. The mysterious priestly figure Melchizedek in the first reading meets Abram returning from a battle and offers him bread and wine blessing him. In this act Melchizedek, for later Christians, was seen to prefigure Jesus as priest and his self-willed gift of his life in sacrifice and its on-going presence in the sacrament of the Holy Eucharist as recorded by St. Paul in today’s second reading. Abram’s response to God’s gifts through Melchizedek is to, in turn, offer a gift of himself through the act of giving a “tenth” a “tithe” of his wealth in return. In today’s gospel selection Jesus in response to the disciples’ concern of how they were to feed so many hungry people tells them, “Give them some food yourselves.” Like Abram, the disciples are being invited to “tithe”, to break open their own giftedness, to share from their own store, to give a gift of themselves to others even as they have experienced Jesus feeding them through his ministry. They are to become, through God’s grace in Jesus, bread for the hungry, drink for the thirsty. This is the challenge of today’s feast and its procession. Now **WE** are to “feed the hungry, give drink to the thirsty, clothe the naked, welcome the stranger, the immigrant, the refugee, shelter the homeless, visit and give comfort to the sick and imprisoned, and bury the dead (Mt. 25). To whom today is Jesus sending each of us to be bread, wine, the grace of divine life—at home, work, on the golf course, at the mall, or wherever life takes us?

Ite missa est. The Mass is ended. Go in peace. THE MASS IS!! THE MASS IS YOU AND ME!! THANKS BE TO GOD!