

## What is the purpose of the Mass?

People have written entire books answering this very simple question. I'll do my best to try to answer it in the little bit of space available for this column.

The word *Mass* comes from the Latin word *missa* which is related to English words such as *commission*, *mission*, and *dismissal*, and which is used in the Latin expression: "Ite, Missa est." This expression is from the dismissal at the end of a Latin Mass. In English we say: "Go in peace to love and serve the Lord," or "The Mass is ended, go in peace."

The Catechism of the Catholic Church states that we use the name Holy Mass "*because the liturgy in which the mystery of salvation is accomplished concludes with the sending forth (missio) of the faithful, so that they may fulfill God's will in their daily lives.*" (CCC #1332) From this perspective, the purpose of the Mass is to strengthen, prepare, and energize us to go out and bring Christ to the world. We respond to the dismissal by saying: "Thanks be to God." We are not giving thanks because Mass is finally over and we can go home to breakfast; we give thanks for all that we have received during the liturgy, the preparation to go out and love and serve God by serving one another.

Pope Paul VI said, "The Mass is the most perfect form of prayer." We have an opportunity for repentance in the penitential rite, and our venial sins can be forgiven. We listen to the Word of God and have it broken open for us in the homily to instruct us for our journey. We offer our petitions during the Prayers of the Faithful and ask for God's help for our community. We give God thanks and praise in the Eucharistic prayer as the priest makes the one holy sacrifice of Christ present on the altar. (*Eucharist* comes from the Greek word for *thanksgiving*.) We are strengthened as we take the Body, Blood, Soul, and Divinity of Christ into our own bodies.

As stated in the General Instruction of the Roman Missal, "[T]he *Sacrifice of the Cross and its sacramental renewal in the Mass, which Christ the Lord instituted at the Last Supper and commanded the Apostles to do in his memory, are one and the same, differing only in the manner of offering, and that consequently the Mass is at once a sacrifice of praise and thanksgiving, of propitiation and satisfaction.*" (GIRM #2)

**Deacon Joe**