

The Transforming Power of the Liturgy

Mission

Throughout his pontificate, Pope Francis has frequently emphasized the missionary option or impulse: “I dream of a ‘missionary option’, that is, a missionary impulse capable of transforming everything, so that the Church’s customs, ways of doing things, times and schedules, language and structures can be suitably channeled for the evangelization of today’s world rather than for her self-preservation” (*Evangelii gaudium*, no. 27). This impulse is a fruit of the Sacred Liturgy, which has power to make us missionaries, to transform us into people who go forth and proclaim the Gospel to those on the margins and peripheries of society.

Theology

Jesus Christ is the One sent by the Father to proclaim the Gospel of the Kingdom, calling all to repentance and faith (cf. Jn 6:29, Mk 1:14-15); indeed, he has come not to call the righteous but sinners (cf. Lk 5:32). He eats and drinks with tax collectors and sinners, draws near to lepers, the sick, and the disabled, and encounters those on the peripheries of first century Jewish society, such as women and Gentiles. Christ exercises this mission to all with great gentleness, fulfilling the prophecy of Isaiah: “Not crying out, not shouting... A bruised reed he shall not break, and a smoldering wick he shall not quench” (Is 42:2-3; cf. Mt 12:19-10). Christ not only proposes the invitation to fullness of life but also helps men and women to receive it.

From the very beginning of his earthly ministry, Christ shares his mission with his disciples: “Whoever receives you receives me, and whoever receives me receives the one who sent me” (Mt 10:40). From the disciples, he chooses twelve men whom he also names apostles (cf. Lk 6:13), a name which means



“one who is sent.” After his resurrection, Christ emphasizes that his identity and mission – the One sent – is to become the identity and mission of those who follow him: “As the Father has sent me, so I send you” (Jn 20:21). Immediately before he ascends into heaven, Christ commissions the disciples to go to all the nations, “baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you” (Mt 28:19-20). The Acts of the Apostles shows the Church carrying out this mission.



“Go and announce the
Gospel of the Lord.”



Liturgy

In his Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation *Sacramentum caritatis*, Pope Benedict XVI proposed that the Dismissal at Mass serves as a starting point for understanding the missionary nature of the Church (no. 51; cf. *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, no. 1332).

The four texts for this ritual action are:

- “Go forth, the Mass is ended.”
- “Go and announce the Gospel of the Lord.”
- “Go in peace, glorifying the Lord by your life.”
- “Go in peace.”

Notably, each text begins with the imperative, “Go,” highlighting the dynamism of the Sacred Liturgy



which sends forth those who have celebrated. This command also recalls moments in salvation history when the Lord called men and women to “go.” For example, forms of that verb are repeated throughout the final chapter of St. Matthew’s Gospel: “Go quickly and tell his disciples” (28:7); “Go tell my brothers to go to Galilee” (v. 10); and “Go and make disciples” (v. 19). As Pope Francis recalled, “There is no Christian if not on the move; no Christian if the Christian does not go out of himself in order to set out on the journey and bear the proclamation” (General Audience, April 12, 2023).

Among its Masses and Prayers for Various Needs and Occasions, the *Roman Missal* contains two Masses that are especially connected to the theme of mission:

- “For the Evangelization of Peoples” (no. 18)
- “For Persecuted Christians” (no. 19)

The first may be used on the Sundays of Ordinary Time when there are special celebrations for the work of the missions, for example, World Mission Sunday on the penultimate Sunday of October. The second formulary is appropriate when praying for missionaries suffering for the sake of the Gospel. Additionally, the third Eucharistic Prayer for Use in Masses for Various Needs, “Jesus, the Way to the Father,” is appropriately used with both formularies.

Action

One way to live the missionary impulse which the liturgy generates is for communities to ask: “Who is not here? For whom have we not made space?” That may be the elderly or the young, the disabled or the poor, or certain races or ethnicities. As Christ did not break the bruised reed, communities are called to make space in inviting, unintimidating ways.



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