

## SENDING OUT

*Sunday 18<sup>th</sup> March 2018/Passion Sunday*

The fourth and final act in the drama of the Eucharist is the sending out. The part where we prepare to step back out into the world, and where we ask ourselves - What does any of it matter?

### THE BLESSING

Just before the Risen Christ leaves his disciples to ascend into heaven, he lifts up his hands and he blesses them.

And likewise, just before we leave, we receive a blessing – from the same Trinity in whose name we gathered at the start of the service.

When someone sneezes we instinctively say: *'Bless you!'*

Blessing is a word that we use a lot but we don't always know what it means. It's easy to think of it as some kind of feel good vibe or superstitious magic.

But a blessing is something bestowed, it is a **gift** that is given.

That's why the church does a lot of blessing – it likes to express God's generosity.

Blessing is also about **goodness**.

A blessing doesn't make something good that wasn't good before.

God blesses, and we bless what we believe to be good so that it may be *even more* good than it already is.

It is about recognising the innate goodness in all things and all people – there are no exceptions to the blessing at the end of Mass – *everyone* is included. It recognises the goodness is already in us, it names it, and raises it up.

But blessing does something else – it sets people and things **apart**.

In the Eucharist we bless bread and wine to become things that share in the goodness of God in a way that sets them apart from what they were before, and for a special purpose. As a result of this they are no longer the same.

And at the end of Mass, you the **people** are also blessed – to set you apart as an expression of the goodness of God and for a special purpose. You are no longer the same either. You have been consecrated for a special purpose.

## THE DISMISSAL

This sense of purpose leads us to the very last words of the service.

The Mass gets its name from its ending.

The word '*dismissal*' and Mass are the same word.

*'Ita missa est'* – Go, you are sent.

Literally '*she*' - the Church – is sent.

We come to Mass as individuals, but we leave as a community,  
as the people of God,  
the body of Christ.

There's a memory at Southwark Cathedral of a former Dean who refused to say the dismissal at Mass until *after* coffee. He would raise his voice over the chatter to say '*Go in the peace of Christ*', and still munching on a digestive biscuit and slurping their coffee the people would reply, '*Thanks be to God*'. I never *actually* met anyone who could remember this *really* happening, but the point of the story was clear. The period of fellowship after Mass is, in a sense, just as much a part of the service as any other part. Even in churches where the coffee is weak and the biscuits soggy, the welcome and fellowship should not be. It is an expression of our common life together as a community.

If the blessing consecrates us, the dismissal sends us on our way.

At the end of each of the Gospels, Christ sends his disciples out:

*'Go therefore and make disciples of all nations'*.

By doing this they are no longer disciples – they become apostles.

People who are sent.

And so are we.

We go out to share in mission of God to the world. To be good news in a world of bad news and fake news, and to be a blessing to others.

You may know the famous prayer of Theresa of Avila:

*'Christ has no body now on earth but yours,  
no hands but yours,  
no feet but yours,  
Yours are the eyes through which to look out  
With Christ's compassion on the world  
Yours are the feet with which he is to go about  
doing good;  
Yours are now the hands with which he is to bless.'*

The dismissal answers the question of why we gather at all.  
We gather in order to be sent out.

We go, but in a particular way: 'in the **peace** of Christ'.  
Over and over again in the Gospels Jesus shares his peace with his disciples.  
We are sent out with that same peace to a sad, angry and lonely world.

We respond to the instruction to go in peace by giving thanks to God.  
For the Eucharist is one great thanksgiving from beginning to end and this is the  
pattern God wants for the whole of our lives. He wants us to live eucharistically.

### HOMO EUCHARISTICUS

To live in this way is to receive our lives thankfully, as a gift, holding them in  
trust, offering them daily back to God from whom everything comes.  
It is a way of being and a frame of mind that is  
trusting rather than anxious,  
grateful rather than grudging,  
compassionate rather than judgemental,  
outgoing rather than selfish.

We set our whole lives in this context of thanksgiving.

In the poem '*Procedure*', Jo Shapcott describes how a cup of tea brings to mind  
her recent experience of cancer, and how it:

*'takes me back to the yellow time  
of trouble with bloodtests and cellular  
madness, and my presence required  
on the slab for surgery, and all that mess ...'*

But having gone through all this suffering, life now takes on a new intensity of  
thankfulness, so that as she drinks the '*scent and strength and steep and  
infusion*' all she can say is:

*'thank you thank you thank you for the then, and now.'*

This is what it means to live eucharistically.  
A life of thankfulness for both now and then.

In so doing, we are not just acting for ourselves.

We are helping to restore, in the smallest of ways, the whole creation to its proper relationship with God.

Even at this moment, wherever the Mass is being celebrated –

In grand cathedrals,

In parish churches,

In hillside chapels

On beaches, in forests,

gorgeously or simply

Wherever and however it may be,

The world is being helped to recover its true value and meaning through the Eucharist which is the way of Christ's self-giving love.

This is what we are about to celebrate in Holy Week and Easter,

When Christ **took** his life in his own hands.

He offered it as a **blessing** to the world.

He **broke** it on the Cross

And then he **gave** it back to us as our own life.

What I am struggling to say, is that in the Sacrament of Eucharist we are bringing into the present everything that speaks of what God did in Jesus Christ – not just a something past, but as something present, and we are sent out to be that reality in the world, transforming its future.

So the work of the Mass never ends.

It continues in us and through us as the Christlike pattern for our lives.

We become '*homo eucharisticus*' – a people formed and shaped by the eucharist as we are

Taken

Blessed

Broken

Shared.