



Strengthened by the true presence of Jesus and following the Prayer after Communion, we are truly ready to go out into the world. What happens before moving from our pews to our cars? That would be the **Concluding Rites**. As *The General Instruction of the Roman Missal* lays out, “To the Concluding Rites belong the following: (a) brief announcements, should they be necessary; (b) the Priest’s Greeting and Blessing, which on certain days and occasions is expanded and expressed by the Prayer over the People or another more solemn formula; (c) the Dismissal of the people by the Deacon or the Priest, so that each may go back to doing good works, praising and blessing God; (d) the kissing of the altar by the Priest and the Deacon, followed by a profound bow to the altar by the Priest, the Deacon, and the other ministers” (*GIRM*, 90).

Many parts of the Concluding Rites mirror what we did at the very beginning of Mass, including the priest’s greeting and response from the people: “The Lord be with you.” “And with your spirit.” What happens next, though, is special to the end of Mass. It also happens to be one of my favorite things about being a priest: blessing the people.

What Is a Blessing?

Our *Catechism of the Catholic Church* glossary includes a definition for *Blessing*: “A blessing or benediction is a prayer invoking God’s power and care upon some person, place, thing, or undertaking. The prayer of benediction acknowledges God as the source of all blessing” (*CCC*, p. 868). Furthermore, “Among sacramentals, *blessings* (of persons, meals, objects, and places) come first. Every blessing praises God and prays for his gifts. In Christ, Christians are blessed by God the Father ‘with every spiritual blessing.’ This is why the Church imparts blessings by invoking the name of Jesus, usually while making the holy sign of the cross of Christ” (*CCC*, 1671).

I love being able to ask God’s strength, help, and protection upon people through blessings. As the Catechism indicates, the act of blessing turns toward God and acknowledges all the good that comes from him and then asks a share of that good for a particular purpose. This is drawn out more clearly through the Solemn Blessings and prayers over the people that can be used at the end of Mass. When one of these is used, the Deacon or Priest will give an instruction after the priest’s greeting and people’s response: “Bow down for the blessing.” This instruction **directs** us to **adopt** a posture **that prepares us for** receiving the blessing from God through the ministry of his priest.

Examples of Blessings Used at Mass

Let’s look at some different blessing options for this part of the Mass. The Solemn Blessing for Ordinary Time II, echoing the words of Philippians 4:7, reads:

P: May the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, keep your hearts and minds in the knowledge of God, and of his Son, our Lord Jesus Christ. R: *Amen*.

P: And may the blessing of almighty God, the Father, and the Son, and the Holy Spirit, come down on you and remain with you forever. R: *Amen*.

What a great blessing! Here we are invoking the peace of God, which is beyond our own abilities, upon the people to help them keep in mind the goodness of God. Sometimes the blessing will be in the format of four phrases with the people responding *Amen* in between, like in this Solemn Blessing for the Beginning of the Year:

P: May God, the source and origin of all blessing, grant you grace, pour out his blessing in abundance, and keep you safe from harm throughout the year. R: *Amen*.

P: May he give you integrity in the faith, endurance in hope, and perseverance in charity with holy patience to the end. R: *Amen*.

P: May he order your days and your deeds in his peace, grant your prayers in this and in every place, and lead you happily to eternal life. R: *Amen*.

P: And may the blessing of almighty God, the Father, and the Son, and the Holy Spirit, come down on you and remain with you forever. R: *Amen*.

As mentioned above, the priest may also use one of the Prayers over the People, such as #17:

P: Bestow increase of heavenly grace on your faithful, O Lord; may they praise you with their lips, with their souls, with their lives; and since it is by your gift that we exist, may our whole lives be yours. Through Christ our Lord. R: *Amen*.

P: And may the blessing of almighty God, the Father, and the Son, and the Holy Spirit, come down on you and remain with you forever. R: *Amen*.

Multiple Blessing Options for Mass

These are just three of the twenty Solemn Blessings and 28 Prayers over the People that are in the Roman Missal. That’s a lot of blessing possibilities! As the Roman Missal indicates, these blessings can be used at the discretion of the priest. There are some that are specifically laid out for Major Solemnities like Christmas, Epiphany, and Easter. But there are also many which can be used at any Mass.

Next time you are at Mass and the priest uses one of these special blessings, try to notice the ways the text acknowledges the goodness of God, and then be ready to receive a special strengthening help from our loving Lord!