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Go in peace to love and serve the Lord

Leader article

This final chapter is very practical and not especially challenging theologically. It invites participants to reflect on what it means to live out the Mass in their daily lives and see it not as an event they attend on a Sunday but as a lifestyle. It invites them to make some clear decisions about how they are being called to participate in God's mission by sharing their faith.

There is not too much need for theological background in such a practical session, but the following may be of help.

Biblical basis

The session is inspired by Mark 3.14, 'And he appointed twelve, whom he also named apostles, to be with him, and to be sent out to proclaim the message' (NRSV). In that sentence we see the twofold action that lies at the heart of the gospel call.

The first action is 'being with' Jesus which the disciples do through the time they spent being taught by him. For us this 'being with' equates to the Mass where we spend time with Jesus, are taught by him in his word and are fed by

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him in the Eucharist. Without this 'being with', our lives are pointless.

The second action is 'being sent.' As the disciples were sent away by Jesus to share the good news, so in the dismissal we are sent out from the Mass to put our faith into practice and invite others to the banquet of eternity.

In Mark's Gospel these two actions are one single sentence. You can't have one without the other. A faith in Jesus that is not expressed in changed lifestyles and participation in God's mission is not authentic faith. It is self-indulgence.

For those using this course to prepare for Confirmation that twofold action is seen in the rite. Candidates express their commitment to 'being with' Jesus as they make the baptismal promises of faith. They are then 'sent out' by Jesus as they receive the Holy Spirit and are commissioned to live their faith out publicly in their daily lives.

God's mission and our part in it

In this chapter, mission is understood as the whole action of God in loving and saving the world. Mission is therefore fundamentally not something that *we* do, it is what God does for us.

The greatest act of God's mission is sending his son Jesus Christ whose birth, death and resurrection alone sets us free. In the Mass we receive grace from these saving acts and feed on the new life of Jesus Christ.

But from the Mass Jesus, the sent one, sends us. We are called to participate in God's mission to the world as we

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make Jesus known through our words and lives. There are many different ways in which we are called to share in God's mission to his world, perhaps best summarized by the Five Marks of Mission:

- 1 to proclaim the good news of the kingdom;
- 2 to teach, baptize and nurture new believers;
- 3 to respond to human need by loving service;
- 4 to transform unjust structures of society, to challenge violence of every kind and pursue peace and reconciliation;
- 5 to strive to safeguard the integrity of creation, and sustain and renew the life of the earth.

The chapter encourages participants to reflect on how they personally are called to share in God's mission to his world as sent ones of the Sent One.

The Mass and the mission of God

This chapter does some simple work with language, based on the Latin verb 'To send': (*mitto, mittere, misi, missus*). It demonstrates how this is the origin of three English words:

- mission (the Father sending the Son to save the world);
- Mass (the liturgical action in which we encounter Jesus, the sent one, in word and sacrament. It is taken from the words of dismissal in the Latin Mass, 'Ite missa est');
- dismissal (Jesus the sent one sending us from the Mass into the world).

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Participants can therefore see that, in the very action of attending Mass, they are sent into the world to share in God's mission. Mass attendance is therefore not a discrete activity but the expression of a lifestyle in which they are called to share the life of Jesus Christ in every aspect of their lives. They are encouraged to think in very practical terms what that might mean for them.

If to be called and to be sent are one action, then what we do in the Mass is indicative of how we are called to live and share our faith in our daily lives. The session therefore explores aspects and sections of the Mass and suggests ways in which those can be lived out in everyday situations.

1 Can you think of three or four ways in which you can share your faith with others?

The idea in this first question is for participants to respond in practical ways to the practical content of this chapter. In feeding back, try to encourage people to be as specific and detailed as possible. If they are going to pray for five non-Christians, ask them to name the five and maybe even stop the session so as actually to pray. If they are going to invite people, who will they ask to come and to what? If they are going to be generous, how will they do this? They may not be confident in speaking in public about their faith, but perhaps they might be encouraged to leave a leaflet or small booklet in a public place for others to pick up (the Church Union has leaflets that could be useful, and The Prayer Trust has a large selection of little booklets and cards), or to go into a local shop and leave a poster detailing what's happening at their church.

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The section on justice may well be one that some will have embraced already in their churches. COVID-19 and its consequences have certainly been times of growth in social outreach in many places. Nonetheless, it may be that we need at this point to introduce the potential of our buildings to be more than simply places of worship but of service also – setting up a group for Church Action on Poverty, working in or establishing food banks or parish pantries, supporting a Place of Welcome, making our churches and halls heat banks, or whatever – and explore what the meaning of the word ‘Liturgy’, the work of the people, might mean for today’s church and that of tomorrow.

True story: one young man, now a churchwarden, was asked by his mother (who lives with disability) to go with her on a pilgrimage to Rome; without his physical help, she would not easily have been able to go. Reluctantly, he agreed; the idea of being with Christians for a week was not his idea of a good time. He encountered a very ordinary group of people who were kind to his mother and to him. Meals were good, and booze plentiful in the evening. The services he attended with his mother were short and sweet. He saw a lot of classical and religious Rome and made a couple of friends his own age and older. And when he came back to the UK, he didn’t come to church. His mother then wanted to go to the Holy Land and again asked for his help. So Israel and Jordan it was. Some of the people from the Rome pilgrimage were in the group. This trip was physically more demanding and others stepped in with offers to ensure his mother was able to get everywhere. Back in the UK, the young man dropped in at church one Sunday morning and stayed. He

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was baptized and confirmed. Kindness and consideration to his mum and to him was the best form of preaching he could have encountered.

However you approach this, by the end of the session participants should have made some clear decisions about how they are going to live out their faith in their daily lives more confidently, even if only by the regular wearing of a lapel cross.

2 What makes you nervous about sharing your faith?

The author of Session 6 says the door is the second most important thing in church, because we pass through it to go home. But he makes clear that we pass through that portal to do significantly more – it's the gateway to mission, to the world in which we live and to which we are called to proclaim good news. While it is true that 'faith sharing should be every bit as natural and easy as praying', the fact of the matter is that it is clearly not as easy; if it were, our churches would be rather fuller than they are. And for some folk, praying is not easy either. We cannot make assumptions about where people are on their journey of faith, and to suggest things are 'easy' may actually make them scarier!

So this is a chance for participants to be honest about something that frightens most of us, which is putting faith into practice. Most participants may be confident with some of the sections in the notes, perhaps prayer and generosity, but much more nervous about proclamation and invitation.

Allow people to name and express their fears and then think of ways in which they can be addressed. It may even

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be worth doing some simple role play in which participants practice expressing their faith with a neighbour.

Of course, it's easy to understand that nerves kick in when people hear a priest saying they need to 'share their faith' and some may well react by saying 'But that's his job!' Priests, they assume, are trained to do this, and being 'untrained' they feel inadequate – they just haven't got the words or people skills 'the trained professional' has. This rather overrates most clergy to be honest, and certainly devalues their own gifting. Perhaps begin with the suggestion of targeted prayer – thinking of those we would love to share our faith, and actively bringing them into the presence of God by our prayerful love. That's something we can all easily do because, apart from God and the one who prays, no one else need know about it.

Nerves also kick in when we wonder what other people will think of us if we were to dare to invite them to join us at church: 'Is this person mad? No one goes to church!' Well, actually the person we might ask possibly knows we go to church anyway and, if they really know us, is quite unlikely to mix us up with the religious fanatic with the sandwich board and the big floppy Bible (though they may well occasionally touch someone's heart and soul!). Research suggests there may be hundreds of thousands 'out there' who are just waiting for an invitation to be asked to accompany someone to church. And offering to walk alongside someone makes it far easier for them to enter our buildings than giving them a time and day and letting them find their own way through the door. But again, the Mass – so central to us – may not be the best first step. A trip to

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the theatre or for a curry, for a summer Sunday afternoon organised ramble or a quiz with fish and chips at church (especially if the person you ask has a really good specialist knowledge of football!) may be a good first port of call.

In addition to the examples of generosity given in the participant article, invite people to think of good ways within their local setting and their own means of sharing something of the goodness of God we experience daily. Perhaps introduce or explore the concept of Friday fasting or the Lenten fast as a way in which we might become generous towards others (the Additional Curates Society, for example, often produces material for Lent).

3 Can you think of some better words for the dismissal at the end of the Mass?

The older Church of England services actually had no dismissal as such at the end of Mass at all. People received Holy Communion, a prayer was said, perhaps followed by a song of praise, and the blessing. It is possible, in a sense, that a well-instructed people didn't need an instruction to go and do anything – they had heard the words of the Lord to 'do this in remembrance of me' and, having received the Lord himself, they went out to live lives that were to be like his: sacrificial.

But many of the ancient liturgies, although having no words of blessing, almost invariably did have dismissal words ('Let us bless the Lord. *Thanks be to God*' or 'Ite missa est/Go it is the dismissal. *Thanks be to God*'). From the 1960s, various forms of the dismissal began to appear in the revised rites of our Church – words such as 'Go forth in

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peace. *Thanks be to God*' or 'Go in peace and serve the Lord. *In the name of Christ. Amen*' – which suggested a purpose to receiving Communion, whether it was to give us something (peace) or to become the means of God doing something in the world through us (Go . . . and serve the Lord). This was mirrored in the words used in some of our churches at the end of Mass (Go in the peace of Christ/The Mass is ended, go in peace. *Thanks be to God*), but recently new words were composed for the Missal which included 'instructions' such as 'Go and announce the Gospel of the Lord' and 'Go in peace, glorifying the Lord by your life'. The purpose of the Mass is seen in these newer dismissal words as transformational, whether for us or by the sharing of the gospel story with others.

Despite this, the liturgical words of the dismissal can still somehow feel dull and anti-climactic, and express very little of the task that the assembly is given as they are sent into the world to share the good news and participate in God's mission. So this question is a chance for the participant to be writers of liturgy and not just consumers of it.

By trying to put into words their understanding behind this section of the liturgy, participants will be enabled perhaps to express something of what they have learnt in this part of the course. If it is the purpose of the dismissal to encourage the assembly to put faith into practice (in the kind of ways described above), then participants will need to be encouraged to think a little about the purpose of the Mass itself. Is it something for us alone (the achievement of some deep peace or relationship with the Lord, as the older words seemed to say) or is it something more dynamic, an

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empowering for service ('fast food' to fuel the journey laid out for us beyond the liturgy), or both, or more?

Much liturgy is fairly terse. But for this exercise there is no word limit. Let people be as imaginative as they like and, if perhaps something exceptional emerges, you might want to try it out on Sunday if you are a priest!

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