

**Homily for May 21, 2006
6th Sunday of Easter (B)**

By Father Charles Bowes

Acts 10:25-26, 34-35, 44-48

Psalm 98:1, 2-3, 3-4

1 John 4:7-10

John 15:9-17

Jesus sends us forth to love.

I know from experience that I can come to Mass sort of depressed and hurting and somehow, through the music and the ritual that we all do together, I find my spirits lifted.

I actually find myself nourished by the presence and the prayer of those around me. It might be an effort to get here, but once here, I meet no less than God – God in very human and halting ways. But we don't stay here. We can't stay here. We leave.

I find that what happens to me here at Mass is not unlike what happens when a heart beats. It draws blood into it, and then sends it to the lungs to take on oxygen. Then the blood is pulled back into the heart and finally sent back through your body to keep you alive. If the heart only took blood in and didn't send it back out, it wouldn't do you much good.

The liturgy is something like a heart, I find. It draws us in when we have been depleted of spiritual energy. It links us to Christ, who revives our spirits and gives us strength. Then it sends us back out into the world.

This sending forth is the final section of the Eucharist. We call it the dismissal, but that's a word that can easily be misunderstood. We might think of dismissal time at school, the time we were finally free to do what we wanted. Or we might think of soldiers

dismissed from formation. Dismissal can sound like simply the end of some gathering.

The dismissal from the Eucharist is more than that. The formula of dismissal in Latin is, "Ite, missa est." That's a very difficult phrase to translate. Our current translation is, "Go, the Mass is ended," but that is a bit weak. Translated literally, the Latin means, "Go, it is the sending." Perhaps a little more elegant translation into English would be, "Go, you are sent." The very word we commonly use for our Sunday worship, the Mass, comes from this dismissal. The Mass is for mission; it strengthens us to send us out again.

When we are dismissed from the liturgy, we are sent forth to carry on the work of Christ in the world. We respond: "Thanks be to God." That almost sounds as if we're just grateful it's over! What it really means is that we are grateful to God for entrusting this sacred mission to us and for strengthening us through the Eucharist to be able to carry it out. And the mission is what Jesus speaks of in John chapter 15 today: "Love one another as I love you...I...chose you...to go and bear fruit that will remain," says Jesus.

Before the actual dismissal, we hear announcements for the week. The reason they come at this point in the liturgy is that they are telling us ways that we can carry on our mission during the week. Here we receive the information we need for our "assignments" for the Lord. Then we pray for God's

blessing before we are formally sent out on mission. Of course, in most parishes, we actually conclude with a final song that accompanies the procession of the ministers through the assembly. That means that the liturgy is not over until the song is finished. Basic courtesy and respect for the Lord and for our brothers and sisters requires all of us to stay in our places singing until the final song is concluded.

Even then, we don't have to make a mad dash for the parking lot. If we care about our brothers and sisters here, some time in conversation and fellowship after Mass is certainly appropriate. Some people may have pressing obligations that require them to leave quickly, but most of us could linger a bit with one another to share our joy in the Lord. Then we go forth to bring Christ to all those we meet throughout the week.

Jesus sends us forth to love.