

# Teaching Masses

As changes have been introduced to the Mass—from the major developments flowing from the Second Vatican Council to the most recent English translation of the Roman Missal instituted in 2011—much of the focus of formation has been on *what* is changing, and not as much on *why* we worship the way we do.

The Eucharistic Revival sponsored by the U.S. Bishops gives us a fresh opportunity to help Catholics better understand the Mass so they can participate more fully and better appreciate what we do when we gather to pray together in this way.

Liturgical guidelines provide an excellent mechanism—through the roles of the commentator and the presider—to offer this kind of formation on special occasions during the Mass itself. We recommend that parishes offer a series of teaching Masses to "break open" the liturgy, focusing on:

- \* The purpose behind parts of the Mass.
- \* The assembly's role during the liturgy.
- \* How the Mass prepares and orients us for our mission in the world.
- \* Historical context that puts the Mass in perspective.

## Won't It Take Too Long?

One of the biggest concerns about offering teaching Masses is that they will extend the length of the service too much.

This partially comes from an expectation that parishioners' highest priority is to keep Mass as brief as possible. In our experience, Catholics are hungry to learn more about their faith and are happy to spend a little more time to do so, if that information is presented well.

With that said, there is no reason that a teaching Mass has to take significantly more time than a regular Mass. This may be an important if you have a tight Sunday Mass schedule.

Some strategies addressing the length question:

- \* Use scripts that are succinct.
- \* Work with your music ministers to open up more time for the commentator. For example, beginning or ending songs instrumentally can allow for extra speaking time. The number of sung verses could also be reduced.
- \* Omit the homily or drastically shorten it. (Note: Do not just *announce* that you will limit the homily, then proceed to give a substantial one. Prepare in advance what will be said at this time, as extemporaneous speaking can easily expand.)
- \* If necessary, split a script across multiple Masses. For example, you could offer commentary on the Introductory Rites the first week, Liturgy of the Word the next week, etc. Or you might do every other comment the first week and the others the second week.
- \* Announce teaching Masses well in advance to set expectations and allow parishioners to make alternate plans if they prefer.

## Ministerial Roles

### ROLE OF THE COMMENTATOR

The *General Instruction on the Roman Missal*, initially written in anticipation of the major changes to the Mass after Vatican II, defines a ministerial role to provide formation during a Mass:

The commentator... provides the faithful, when appropriate, with brief explanations and commentaries with the purpose of introducing them to the celebration and preparing them to understand it better. The commentator's remarks must be meticulously prepared and clear though brief. [GIRM, #105]

In addition, the *GIRM* notes that the commenta-

tor should be clear about the text they will be using and that they should not improvise. "Harmonious planning and carrying out of the rites will greatly assist in disposing the faithful to participate in the Eucharist" [*GIRM*, #353].

## ROLE OF THE PRESIDERS

The *GIRM* also assigns responsibility to the priest presider to introduce and explain various parts of the Mass (see *GIRM*, #31). The document makes it clear that this should be done briefly and in line with the explanatory text found in the Missal. During a teaching Mass, you will have to decide if it's helpful for the presider to offer explanations, or if it's most effective for all instruction to come from the commentator.

## Planning

### SCHEDULING

- \* We highly recommend scheduling these Masses at your regular Sunday liturgy times. After all, the main purpose is to help all of your regulars to participate more fully. If you really want to maximize the impact, offer it on Easter Sunday. How many might it convince to return?
- \* Consider repeating them over the span of weeks or months. This gives word-of-mouth a chance to attract others.
- \* Coordinate with your ministries. These are great events for RCIA candidates, confirmation sponsors, families preparing for First Communion, family faith formation, youth ministry, etc.

### SPREAD THE WORD

- \* Promote your teaching Masses well in advance and explain the value well. Make sure regulars are not surprised so they are tolerant if Mass goes a little longer than usual.
- \* Encourage your regulars to invite others. This is a great opportunity for evangelization: those curious about Catholicism, family members who might not be regularly attending any more, etc.
- \* List the Masses in your local community events calendar or through other means.

## FIND YOUR COMMENTATORS

- \* It is crucial to identify volunteers who have the right gifts to serve as commentators. It may be natural to draw from your pool of lectors, but others in your parish may also be a good match.
- \* An ideal commentator would be able to speak clearly, use a warm, conversational style, and be willing to put in the necessary practice and preparation.

## POSITION THE COMMENTATOR

- \* The *GIRM* states that "the commentator stands in a suitable place within sight of the faithful, but not at the ambo" [#105]. Choose a prominent position where the presider will also be able to see them clearly. Provide a good microphone.

## PREPARATION & PRACTICE

- \* Note: A teaching Mass can be a powerful experience, but *it is tricky and requires careful planning and practice*.
- \* The presider, music leader, and commentator will need to work closely to plan in advance so the Mass will flow smoothly.
- \* The handoffs between each role will be tricky. The presider, in particular, will need to be careful to not go on "autopilot" and talk over the commentator.
- \* Place tiny sticky notes or (even better) sticky note "flags" as reminders in the Missal—or any other texts that the presider reads from—wherever the commentator will be reading.
- \* The presider, music leader, and commentator *must* practice together in advance. Even if you don't have time to go through the entire Mass, try running through a good portion.
- \* Alert other ministers (lectors, cantors, whoever makes announcements) who will be affected.

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# THE MASS IS NEVER ENDED

## TEACHING MASS SCRIPT

*Please be sure to first read the overview document on teaching Masses for general recommendations.*

***A note on timing:*** *We have timed the commentator's text to be about 11 minutes of reading. If the provided one-minute homily is used in the place of a standard length homily and if the commentary is allowed to overlap part of the opening and offertory songs as suggested, the length of the Mass could actually be shorter than usual. Feel free to edit and adapt the text as you see fit for your community.*

***A note on the commentator role:*** *The commentator text in this should not be read as if it were Holy Scripture or a speech. It is written in a “down-to-earth” conversational style so it will be inviting and easy to understand. Practice reading it as if to a friend. This script in particular would benefit from a gifted reader, perhaps someone with drama background, who could greatly influence how well the text will be received by the assembly.*

***A note on pronunciation:*** *The Latin words “Ite, missa est” (below) is pronounced as “EE-teh, MEE-suh ehst.”*

*For greater detail and an extended reflection on what our work in the world looks like, we highly recommend purchasing the book that this script is adapted from: The Mass Is Never Ended: Rediscovering Our Mission to Transform the World by Gregory F. Augustine Pierce (<https://pastoral.center/the-mass-is-never-ended>).*

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## **GATHERING**

Commentator: Welcome to our teaching Mass.

We ask for your patience, as Mass will move a little slower than usual today.

Our hope is that you will never think about the Mass the same way again.

Today we seek to understand the Mass through the lens of the Dismissal,

as if it were the most important part of the Mass. Why?

The word Mass comes from the Latin words for the Dismissal,

*“Ite, missa est,”* which mean “Go, we are sent forth.”

Sometime in church history,

some people thought this was important enough

to name *the entire thing* after it.

The Latin verb on which *missa* is based

was originally a military term that had the connotation “to throw or to hurl.”

That's where the modern English word *missile* comes from,

as well as *mission*, *missionary*, and *dismissal*.

So the Dismissal from Mass originally meant that

we were being “shot like out of a cannon” back into the world

to carry out a “mission”

that was central to why we had come together

to celebrate the Mass in the first place.

*Music leaders begin the opening song instrumentally.*

What is that mission?

It is the very mission on which Jesus

sent his disciples over 2,000 years ago.

That mission is no less than to transform the world into a place

much more like the way God would have things:

the world as it *should* be.

This mission is, of course, impossible on the face of it.

It's obvious that we, the “people of God,”

have not succeeded the entire time we have been on this mission.

So why even try?

We try because Jesus asked us to try.

The Mass is the perfect liturgy to help us accomplish

this “mission impossible.”

Looking through the lens of the Dismissal,

Catholics would never *go* to Mass or *come* to Mass or *attend* Mass.

We are *coming back* from having been *sent forth*

from the previous Mass we attended.

So like the good friends and colleagues in mission that we are,

we greet one another and sing a song.

*Music leaders begin leading the assembly in singing (we recommend singing one less verse and refrain than usual). The entrance procession begins.*

## **Gloria**

Commentator: Suddenly, we are so happy that we start singing again.  
This time it is the “Glory to God,”  
the ancient hymn of all Christians to express our joy  
at being part of the entire enterprise.  
We are in a line of over 2,000 years of people  
coming together and then being sent forth again.  
So we give thanks to our God “in the highest”  
and ask for “peace to his people on earth.”  
Remember: In a little while we will be sent forth in that same peace  
to glorify that same Lord with our lives.  
But our time together is already running out,  
and we still have a lot of work to do.

**All: Glory to God in the highest...**

## **THE LITURGY OF THE WORD**

Commentator: We’ve only got about 45 minutes left before the Dismissal.  
If we are going to do a better job next time,  
we need to better prepare ourselves,  
and what better way than to look in the Good Book itself—  
the Bible, the divinely inspired work of God?  
From the point of view of the Dismissal,  
the important thing is what we are looking for in the readings:  
advice and inspiration for carrying out  
the mission we are about to be sent forth upon.

### **First Reading**

Presider: A reading from...

**All: Thanks be to God.**

### **Second Reading**

Commentator: Sometimes the advice for our mission found in the readings is easy to understand;  
other times it takes a little more work to apply it to our immediate situation.  
Sometimes one reading will speak to us; other times another will.  
When we’re really paying attention,  
sometimes all three readings will strike us  
as being directly about how we are to live our lives  
in the carrying out of our mission.  
So we say “Thanks be to God”  
(the same as we will say when we are sent forth at the Dismissal).

### **The Eucharistic Prayer**

Commentator: The priest now will take our gifts, pray over them,  
and say the words of consecration,  
transforming our gifts (our daily work)  
into the body and blood of Jesus, into divine life itself.

Presider: The Lord be with you...  
...all glory and honor is yours, for ever and ever.

**All: Amen.**

Commentator: So our work has been accepted, made holy,  
and transformed into the holy of holies.

What else can we do but say or sing the great “Amen” or “So be it,”  
for we are once again going to be sent out on our mission  
and are accepting it wholeheartedly (if with some trepidation).

There are only a few minutes left before we are dismissed,  
and there are only a couple of tasks left to accomplish.

### **The Lord's Prayer**

Commentator: First, we need to remind ourselves what that mission is.

It is easy to get confused, what with all the mixed signals we receive  
from both the church and the world.

So we go back to the source, to the prayer that Jesus gave us.

We pray, “thy kingdom come—thy will be done (it’s the same thing)—  
on earth as it is in heaven.”

There it is: a mission truly worthy of our lives,  
and we are all going to be sent forth to accomplish it.

For it is not our kingdom that we are trying to build,  
for “The kingdom, and the power and the glory  
are yours, now and forever.”

**All: Our Father...**

Presider: For the kingdom, the power and the glory are yours now and forever...