

**“Vayan con Dios – Go with God”**  
**Rite of Conclusion**  
**Second Hispanic Conference for Pastoral Musicians**  
**San Antonio, Texas**  
**August 12, 2001**

**Introduction**

A closing rite will usually end well if it is begun well, if it has had an excellent Liturgy of the Word, of the Eucharist and of communion. The entire Eucharistic celebration can be seen as a climb up a mountain, such as Mt. Everest. A climb such as this requires a great deal of preparation, including the arduous preparation of the body. Appropriate food, exercise, and mental conditioning are required before the climb begins. There are several steps in reaching the summit of the mountain, beginning with base camp. Even at that point, acclimatization is necessary. At every step the common effort of a team is absolutely essential. You do not climb such a mountain by yourself. The climb begins with appropriate rest stops at intervening camps. Finally the summit is reached after an extraordinary human effort in reaching the top.

Those who make it – and not all do – are caught up in an unforgettable emotion, as they look at the world from the top. Never have they seen such a panoramic view. For this they prepared with enormous sacrifice of time, money, and excruciating human effort.

Even the climb down requires care and safety measures. The same teamwork that went into the climb up the mountain is continued on the way down. Eventually base camp is reached again. Usually this moment is marked by euphoria and a victory celebration for the heroic achievement. Then everyone goes their separate ways, back to their ordinary lives after having experienced a life-long dream. After such a heroic feat, life is never the same again. The climbers will never forget the exhilarating experience of having reached the top.

Looking at the liturgy this way makes us reflect on various parallel things that happen between liturgy and a mountain climb. Preparation is absolutely necessary for any and every liturgy; we cannot simply drop into a liturgical celebration without at least some kind of preparation. In the design of churches, for example those in Mexico built in the 16th century, atrios or atriums were essential. To go into the church, one needed to go through that atrium, and in doing so, prepared themselves bodily and spiritually to enter the sacred confines of the place of worship.

Base camp could be seen in the liturgy as the Entrance Rite. The intervening stops could be seen as the Liturgy of the Word at which time we reflect on how far we have come and how far we have to go. We are also told of the challenges ahead and how God's power will enable us to reach the very top.

For me, the summit is the Eucharistic Prayer and especially the Great Amen. When I lift the consecrated bread and wine, I usually gather in my heart everything that everyone in the congregation has brought to the celebration: their joys and sorrows, their achievements and failures, their strengths and weaknesses, their hopes and fears, their laughter and tears, their accomplishments and disappointments, and these I offer: "Through him, with him, and in him, in the unity of the Holy Spirit, all glory and honor are yours, Almighty Father, forever and ever. AMEN." At the summit we stay awhile and eat of the food that God gives us to return to base camp and on to the places in the world where we are being sent. The entire descent could be seen as the Rite of Conclusion or of Sending and at base camp we take leave of one another before going on to pursue our ordinary tasks, invigorated by the experience of going up the mountain.

To me this makes a lot of sense, and the powerful message that this analogy brings to me is that liturgy is not easy, it takes everything we have in order to bring it to successful completion, such as the mountain climb that I have described. No one goes up that mountain by himself or herself. It

is a team effort and one mis-step on the part of any one member of the team can mess up the entire journey. The other thing that impresses me about the analogy is that once having been at the summit, we are never the same again. All liturgies, especially those which have been celebrated well, leave an indelible mark on our lives as individuals and as Church. These kinds of liturgies empower us to be even stronger witnesses in the world and enable people to contribute to a world of justice, love and peace, which reflect the dreams of the Kingdom preached by Jesus Christ.

I would like to make clear that the concluding rite of the Mass includes everything that takes place after the post-communion prayer. The General Instruction for the Roman Missal explains briefly what this rite is about and how it should be done. It is in the missal or sacramentary that we find the richness of possibilities that the concluding rite contains. I am specifically referring to the blessings and prayers over the people. Although, according to liturgical norms, we cannot compose blessings *ad libitum*, there are 52 possibilities: the missal offers 26 blessings for different liturgical feasts and other occasions and 26 prayers over the people. The English sacramentary contains the prayers over the people at the end of the ordinary Sunday prayers. The Mexican Roman Missal as well as the American sacramentary include a group of blessings and prayers over the people after the ordinary of the Mass. I believe we could select some of these blessings or prayers over the people, based on the theme or the focus of the homily, that serve as a reminder of the message of the Word of God before the dismissal of the people. We should remember that one has the option of singing these blessings and prayers over the people. This offers another opportunity for you who are composers to be inspired and to provide us with music for these prayers and blessings.

There is an ever growing number of options of recessional hymns in Spanish. Just look at the popular hymnal, *Flor y Canto*. *Flor y Canto* offers 34 songs with themes on church, mission and witness, that could very well be used as recessional hymns. Furthermore, *Flor y Canto* offers no less

than 87 songs of praise and thanksgiving that could also be used for the recessional. This is much better than what we had in my small parish when I was young. Back then we could choose between only three songs in Spanish: “*Adiós oh Virgen de Guadalupe*,” “*Adiós Reina del Cielo*,” and “*Que viva mi Cristo*”.

We must also remember that the announcements made usually after the communion prayer could also be considered part of the conclusion of the Mass, even though the primary purpose they serve is a practical one. I remember on one occasion being in a parish in New York for Sunday Mass. I had decided to just be in attendance and observe the way they celebrated the Eucharist. The priest who presided was not Hispanic but could read the texts of the Mass clearly. The homily was given by a deacon who was not Hispanic either but who delivered a good message. However, the entire Mass was somewhat boring, with no enthusiasm, until the announcements were read. A Puerto Rican lady got up and in a loud voice and with much enthusiasm, read the announcements. That lady was able to bring the assembly to life. She was able to make them laugh and catch their attention. From the human point of view, the announcements were the best part of that Mass. This lady created a happy environment that was felt by all. With this we can see that the way we make the announcements is important. Much of this will also depend on who reads them.

### **The liturgy and the rhythm of life**

The rhythm of human life has a lot to say about the liturgy. What we ordinarily do can give us some indications about how to celebrate the liturgy. The liturgy in itself incorporates aspects of life: eating and drinking at a table, the gift of peace, gestures of respect such as standing, bowing, and kneeling, and the dialogue between the presider and the congregation.

It is true that the liturgy takes us much further than ordinary life and in worship one is transported, to a certain extent, in a mystical and transcendental way. The liturgy is a sacred

moment during which one tries to enter a world that is not this world, a time that is not this time, and to take initiatives that allow the human community to unite itself with the divine reality.

However, we continue to be humans and not pure spirits: we are made of flesh and blood, we feel happiness, sadness, depression, euphoria; sometimes we are strong and other times we are weak. At times we really do not want to be in Church, we would rather be at the beach, in the mountains, or doing something more entertaining. The fact that we are human allows us to bring our humanity to this event we call *liturgy*.

For this reason, I want to allude during this talk to some human and cultural aspects that can be related with the concluding rite of the Eucharistic celebration. (Although what I am going to say could be applied to any type of celebration: funeral, baptism, quinceañera and others.) I would like to analyze three elements within this rite: the rite of closing, of farewell, and of sending.

### **The rite of conclusion as a closing**

The way in which we bring closure to human events shows us the importance of those events. I remember the closing ceremonies for each of the Olympics, especially the closing ceremony of the 1968 Olympics in Mexico. If any of you are old enough, you will recall that during the closing the field of the stadium was filled with hundreds of *mariachis* playing and singing “*Las Golondrinas*.”

We also have the closings of theater shows. These do not just end when the curtain closes. The actors come out to hear the applause and praise from the audience. This also happens at the conclusion of a symphony concert or an opera. Graduations are also ceremonial landmarks of an end of an era in education at all levels, starting from kindergarten all the way to those receiving their doctorate degrees. These are times of great emotion, for even in the “graduation from kindergarten” there are tears, applause, along with cake and ice cream. We also recall the way we conclude

weddings and funerals with special tokens of appreciation and remembrance. I remember when my brother and sister-in-law were leaving on their honeymoon after the wedding ceremony and party, they went to their parents' homes to receive their blessing. We sometimes end funerals with extended rites to mark the end of the lives of our loved ones.

In the same way, the closing of the Mass cannot end abruptly. It deserves some solemnity and ceremony.

### **The rite of conclusion as a farewell**

Farewells should be a very important part of our lives. I say this because one of the first things we teach our children is how to say good-bye. The child is still not able to speak, but at least he can show his loving farewell. The child's farewell fills people with acceptance and joy, and everyone is assured that this child will be brought up correctly and will have good manners.

I want to point out other farewells that Hispanics tend to use. When children leave home, they do not tend to do so without their parents' blessing. I am thinking of occasions, as I mentioned above, at the end of a wedding when the newlyweds leave. There is also the time when the young men and women leave home to attend a university or to join the military. The funeral is a long farewell that family and friends give to their loved one. The church celebrates this farewell with much solemnity, for it is the last farewell given to this person.

We all have vivid memories of the farewell of those who are dying. This type of farewell evokes profound emotions, and it is also accompanied by a blessing, ordinarily if the father or grandfather is dying, they are the ones who give their blessing to their children and grandchildren.

I want to point out three examples of this farewell of the dying. When my grandmother, Panchita was dying, she left us with the comforting words, "I only want to see the face of the Lord."

Also comforting for us is remembering that when she was dying, she would sing songs she had learned in catechism, especially “*Al cielo, al cielo quiero ir.*”

I recall the farewell of one of my cousins when my Aunt Antonia was dying. My aunt had been in a coma for more than a month, and this situation was increasingly hard for the family because she neither came to nor died. One night my cousin Arturo spoke to her in her ear and told her, “Mother, you can leave now. We are ready and we know you are going to a better place. We are all grown up and we can make it on our own. You have our permission to go with God.” That night my aunt died after having heard her son’s farewell.

The other example I remember is of a man from one of my parishes who died not too long ago. As he lay dying, he was surrounded by his wife, children, grandchildren, and great-grandchildren. Everyone was crying because they were losing a loved one. The man, on his deathbed, smiled at them and told them, “Don’t cry, can’t you see who’s here?” He pointed to the side and said, “Look! There she is, can’t you see her? It’s the Virgin of Guadalupe who is there extending her hand to me to take me to Jesus.” With those words he died. What a great comfort for that family.

At the end of Mass, there is an aspect of farewell, that I would call “sweet sorrow.” When Mass ends, we take leave of the Holy Trinity, the living and powerful God, who is present at Mass in a unique way. We are leaving the temple that symbolizes the People of God, built of the living and precious stones that we are as baptized persons. We are saying good-bye to the symbols and images that remind us of our communion with the saints. We are also saying good-bye to our brothers and sisters in faith, God’s family and our family, the ones that form the family of the children of God. We say good-bye to blood family members, godparents, godchildren, uncles, aunts, cousins, etc.

Some of these people we will only see during Sunday Mass, and we say farewell knowing that we will miss them during the week.

Some modern recessional or farewell songs of the Mass have a lot of rhythm and movement, but it has not always been this way. For me, that sweet sorrow I was referring to was more expressive with songs such as “*Adiós oh Virgen de Guadalupe*” or “*Adiós Reina del Cielo*”. How different from what is sung in English in hymns such as “Lift High the Cross”:

Lift high the cross,  
the love of Christ proclaim,  
till all the world adore,  
his sacred name

Mexican farewell songs, and I imagine it is the same with other Hispanic nations as well, reflect this aspect of sweet sorrow, for example, “*Las Golondrinas*” which is about saying good-bye to one’s native country.

*A donde irán veloces y fatigadas,  
Las golondrinas que de aquí se van.  
O si en el viento se hallará extraviada  
Buscando abrigo y no lo encontrará*

*Dejé también mi patria idolatrada,  
Esa mansión que me miró nacer,  
Mi vida es hoy errante y angustiada  
Y ya no puedo a mi mansión volver*

*Junto a mi lecho le pondré su nido  
En donde pueda la estación pasar,  
También yo estoy en la región perdido.  
Oh cielo santo y sin poder volar.*

*Ave querida amada peregrina,  
Mi corazón al tuyo estrecharé;  
Oiré tu canto tierna golondrina  
Recordaré mi patria y lloraré.*

Then there's "La Barca de Oro":

*Yo ya me voy al puerto donde se halla  
la barca de oro que debe conducirme  
Yo ya me voy, sólo vengo a despedirme,  
Adiós mujer, adiós para siempre adiós.  
No volverán mis ojos a mirarte  
Ni tus oídos escucharán mi canto  
Voy a aumentar los mares con mi llanto  
Adiós mujer, adiós para siempre, adiós.*

### **Rite of conclusion as a sending**

We end the Mass with the words, "Let us go in peace, the Mass has ended." With these or similar words, we are sent out into the world to live the Mass. In reality the Mass never ends, we continue living it in the ordinary time of our lives. What we learn at Mass, what we celebrate, what we live, what we enjoy, what we experience, all of this, if we have done this from the heart, has to have a long-lasting effect on our lives, on our work, on our families, on our social life, on our journey, on our comings and goings, on our sleeping and waking.

We are not only called to live in peace with others but also to work for more peace in the world. We have all heard the expression by Pope Paul VI, "If you want peace, work for justice." This is a never-ending challenge, for we are sent to live out the implications of the Gospel we have heard, the Our Father we have prayed, and the communion we have enjoyed. The Gospel is a lamp for our feet, the light that shows us the way, and it reminds us that we are communities of light and salt for the earth. As church, we must take part of the fears and hopes, sadness and joys of everyone in the world. We are called to bring the saving power of Jesus Christ to all the situations of pain and to bring the clarity of the word of God to people who do not know why they exist and who live without meaning in their lives.

I had the privilege of being a missionary in an indigenous area in Mexico for 10 years. I think I received more evangelization than what I could provide. After several attempts to teach the

Gospel, I heard the people summarize it all with these words, “We are called to make the world more beautiful and the people happier”.

If we leave with only these simple words, in them we will find the meaning of the sending forth at the end of Mass, “The Mass has ended, let us go in peace. Thanks be to God.”