Men are born to live; Christ was born to die.

He was born in Bethlehem to give his life for our salvation, in fulfillment of his priestly mission. Christ wants us to remember him for his death. He himself gave us the fitting memorial to it, to reactivate and make present the very sacrifice of Calvary, to remind us that He died so that we may have life, so that we may be freed from the tyranny of sin. He told us the exact way He wanted us to commemorate His death, His resurrection, and His ascension to heaven. The memorial He gave us is the Mass.

It is a mistake to think that the Mass is a memorial service like that on Memorial Day, or a sort of imitation of the Last Supper, or a collection of prayers. The Mass is not just a collection of prayers, no matter how beautiful or moving they may be. Our Lord becomes present in the Mass, doing something deeply supernatural: performing a sacrifice.

WHERE DOES THE TERM “MASS” COME FROM?

It is very possible that you may not know what “Mass” means. After all, you probably have always heard the Mass said in your own language. But “Mass” is derived from the way the Mass was ended in Latin.

Because of the familiarity of the ending, the celebration of our Lord’s Supper eventually became known simply as the “Mass.” There were actually two dismissals in the celebration -- one in which catechumens (people who were not fully Catholic yet but wanted to be) were dismissed right after the sermon, and the dismissal at the end, when all the fully initiated Catholics, the faithful, were dismissed. There were two “Masses,” namely the Mass of the Catechumens and the Mass of the Faithful.

The fact that we call this greatest of Christian prayers the “dismissal” points to the essence of what it means to be a follower of Jesus Christ. Our Lord calls us to Himself and through His saving act invites us to a unity with God the Father through the power of His Holy Spirit. Jesus makes communion with God possible. But following Jesus does not stop with this communion, for once He has united us to Himself, He then sends us forth with a mission (a dismissal).

“Go” is one of His final words to His disciples as He ascends into heaven in the Gospel of Matthew’s account. Hence, the way every Mass ends with “go” is at the heart of what we come to the Mass for -- to be empowered by God and sent forth again.

The “go” that is the very meaning of the word “Mass” receives its meaning from our communion with our Lord Jesus Christ during the Mass, where we believe and come to know Him!