

The Eucharistic Prayer of the Mass

The following notes are based on two documents:

- ✦ the **General Instruction of the Roman Missal**, published by authority of Pope Paul VI and revised by Pope John Paul II;

Celebrating the Mass, a pastoral instruction published by the Catholic Bishops' Conference of England & Wales.

The General Instruction says that the Eucharistic Prayer is "*the centre and summit of the entire celebration*" of Mass. The Bishops' instruction elaborates on this: "*Through this prayer ... the Church gives praise and thanks for God's holiness and justice and for all God's mighty deeds in creating and redeeming the human race, deeds which reached their climax in the incarnation, life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. In the Eucharistic Prayer, the mystery of Christ's saving death and resurrection is recalled; the Last Supper is recounted; the memorial sacrifice of [Christ's] Body and Blood is presented to the Father; and the Holy Spirit is invoked to sanctify the gifts and [to] transform those who [eat and drink] them into the Body of Christ, uniting the assembly [that's us!] and the whole Church and family of God, living and dead, into one communion of love, service and praise to the glory of [God] the Father.*"

So, that is what we are **doing** when we pray the Eucharistic Prayer. And I hope that you get some idea of how really comprehensive and vast the Eucharistic Prayer is in its scope. It really is impossible for us mere mortals to grasp all of it all of the time. In fact, it is more of a **mystery for us** to allow ourselves **to be immersed in** than it is **something to be grasped intellectually**. It is something more of the heart than of the head - which is not to say that intellectual understanding does not help us to be drawn more deeply into the unfathomable riches of this great Mystery. No, understanding the Eucharistic Prayer better will almost certainly help us to grow in our spiritual and emotional appreciation of it and to deepen our participation in it.

"To deepen our participation in it". The Second Vatican Council, in its Decree on the Sacred Liturgy, said this: "*Mother Church earnestly desires that **all the faithful should be led to that full, conscious and active participation which is demanded by the very nature of the liturgy and to which Christian people [who are] a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a redeemed people, have a right and [an] obligation by reason of their baptism.***"

So, **your** full, conscious and active participation in the Eucharistic prayer is not merely a right. You are **obliged**, by your baptism, to share in it **fully, consciously and actively**. You are not simply to be there and watch me "saying Mass" - to use an outdated phrase.

How do we develop and deepen our participation in the Eucharistic Prayer? As I have written, a little more knowledge and understanding is always helpful. But, the absolutely essential requirement is the life of our own personal prayer that we bring to the celebration of Mass. If we are not people who pray anyway, we will never participate fully, consciously and actively.

But, I think, there are several practical things we also need to do if we are going to participate in the Eucharistic Prayer more fully and fruitfully.

- ✦ First of all, physical posture is important. Whether we are asked to stand or to kneel – or, if age or whatever means we need to sit – we must **stand, kneel or sit** and be **quiet, still and attentive**.
- ✦ Secondly, we have got to **listen** and listen **actively** and **attentively**, trying to grasp some of the meaning and understand what is being said. Do not let it just wash over you!
- ✦ Thirdly, we have all got to **join in** fully at the appropriate parts: the **dialogue** at the beginning; the **Sanctus** or Holy, holy acclamation; the **memorial acclamation** and the **Great Amen** at the end. Think about what you are saying and mean what you say.
- ✦ Fourthly, **watch** what I am doing – especially **when I call down the Holy Spirit** to make holy the gifts of bread and wine, **when I show you the gifts** of consecrated bread and wine which are the Body and Blood of Christ and **when I raise the consecrated bread and wine** at the climax of the prayer – the doxology or “word of praise” at the end which is endorsed and ratified by your – hopefully, thunderous! – **Amen!**
- ✦ Fifthly, - and most importantly – **pray** along with me. I cannot emphasise too much how important the prayer – and the prayerfulness – of each one of us present at Mass is, if the celebration of Mass is going to be as beautiful, as engaging and as fruitful as it could and should be.

The Mass is tremendous. The Mass is beautiful. The Mass is absolutely wonderful because it is the power of God’s presence among us, God’s holy people. That presence does not depend on us but, if that presence is going to be more fully effective, it needs me **and you** to take part in the Mass **fully, actively** and **consciously**. **Amen!**

Father Michael Murphy, October, 2009