

The Eucharistic Prayer of the Mass – part 2

The following notes complete what I wish to write about the Eucharistic Prayer of the Mass and are based on the same two documents as my previous notes:

- ✦ 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.

In these notes, I would like to write about the different parts, or elements, of the Eucharistic Prayer.

The Eucharistic Prayer begins with a “dialogue” or “sacred conversation” between you and me. This “sacred conversation” establishes, right from the outset, that the Eucharistic Prayer is something and I **and you** are **doing** together. We are **all** invited to “*lift up [our] hearts*”, that is: to raise up and place in God’s presence our “*entire being, thoughts, memories, emotions and expectations*” [*Celebrating the Mass*].

The whole Eucharistic Prayer proclaims the Church’s thanks for God’s saving work but this praise and thanksgiving is concentrated, especially, in the “**preface**”. There are ninety-one different prefaces currently available for use in the Roman Catholic tradition. Each of them stresses a particular aspect of God’s saving work.

In the Sanctus or “holy, holy” acclamation, the Church on earth is taken up into and joined with the eternal liturgy of heaven, where the entire communion of saints, the heavenly powers or angels and – ultimately – all of creation give praise to God. The words of the Sanctus are inspired by the prophet Isaiah’s vision: “*Holy, holy, holy is the Lord of hosts. God’s glory fills the whole earth*” [*Isaiah 6 : 3*].

Most of the Eucharistic Prayers continue, after the Sanctus, with more proclamations of God’s praise and glory but, sooner [as in Eucharistic Prayer II] or later [as in Eucharistic Prayers III and IV], we call down God’s Holy Spirit to make holy the gifts of bread and wine so that they become the Body and Blood of Jesus Christ. This part is often known by the Greek word “epiclesis” – meaning to “call down”.

Later on in the Eucharistic Prayer, there is another “calling down” of the Holy Spirit, asking God to gather those who receive the Body and Blood of Christ into a true communion of faith and love.

At the heart of the Eucharistic Prayer is the account of the Last Supper, the Institution Narrative and Consecration. At this central point of the Mass, everything for which God has been thanked and praised, all that God has accomplished in the history of salvation, is summed up and made present in the person of the crucified and risen Lord.

Immediately after the consecration of the bread, the Roman Missal says this: “[*The priest*] **shows the consecrated host to the people, places it on the paten [or ciborium dish] and genuflects in adoration.**” The Missal says likewise about the showing of the chalice. Celebrating the Mass stresses that this is a “showing”, **not**

an elevation. [The elevation is part of the “doxology” or words of praise at the end of the Eucharistic Prayer].

This means that, if I am “showing”, you should be “**looking**” and, as you look, it is appropriate to make some short profession of faith in the Real Presence such as “Jesus, my Lord” or “My Lord and my God” – echoing the words of the Apostle, Thomas. When I genuflect in adoration of Jesus, it is appropriate that you should all bow in adoration of him.

In the Memorial Acclamation [the “Christ has died ...” etc.], we express our belief in the central mystery of our faith, namely the Paschal Mystery of Christ’s death, resurrection and presence among his people.

The Memorial Acclamation is always followed immediately by the “making memorial” or “anamnesis”, to use the Greek term. In this, the Church keeps the memorial of Christ, “*recalling especially his blessed Passion, glorious Resurrection and Ascension into heaven*” [General Instruction of the Roman Missal].

The anamnesis either leads into or includes the Offering. We offer, sacramentally in the Holy Spirit, Christ, the spotless victim, to the Father, offering ourselves to God in union with him.

This is followed by some intercessory prayer. We celebrate Mass in communion with the entire Church, in heaven as well as on earth. Consequently, we give honour to Mary and the saints and ask for their prayer and intercession before God for us. We pray for the Pope and the bishops, for the clergy and the entire people of Christ and, finally, we pray for the dead, asking God to “*bring them into the light of [his] presence*” [Eucharistic Prayer II].

The Eucharistic Prayer reaches its conclusion and climax in the final Doxology and Great Amen – a last great act of the glorification of God which is confirmed and concluded by the assembly’s thunderous acclamation of assent: Amen! “*Through him, with him, in him ...*”. All glory and honour is given to the almighty Father **through** Christ, the Great High Priest, **with** Christ, who is truly present in his Church, and **in** Christ who, through the Holy Spirit, has made us, his people, into his Body so that we are in him as he is in us.

Finally, Celebrating the Mass says this: “*At the conclusion of the Eucharistic Prayer, the priest should make a **distinct pause** to make clear that the Eucharistic Prayer is complete ...*”. I am sure that you have noticed that I do just that – make a pause at the end of the Eucharistic Prayer. Obviously, this “pause” will only work if **we all pause** at that point and do not immediately rush to our feet to “get on” with the Lord’s Prayer and the rest of Mass!

Speaking of the final Doxology and Great Amen, Celebrating the Mass says: “*At the climax of the [Eucharistic] Prayer, the consecrated elements are raised high*”. This elevation of the consecrated bread and wine, which is the Body and Blood of Christ, is a very dramatic gesture which vividly expresses the whole point of the Eucharistic sacrifice: to offer praise and thanksgiving and honour and glory to God through Christ, with Christ and in Christ and to offer, along with Christ, our very selves as a “*living sacrifice of praise*” [Eucharistic Prayer IV].

Through him, with him, in him, in the unity of the Holy Spirit, all glory and honour is yours, almighty Father, for ever and ever. Amen!

Father Michael Murphy, October, 2009