

Come to the Feast

Further Reading 3



Week 3: Give Thanks & Praise

Celebrating the Mass

EUCCHARISTIC PRAYER

189 The following elements may be recognised as characteristic of the Eucharistic Prayer. They do not all appear with equal weight in every Eucharistic Prayer.

Dialogue

190 Since the celebration of Mass is a communal action, the dialogue between priest celebrant and the assembly is of special value. It is not only an external sign of communal celebration, but also fosters and brings about communion between priest and people. The dialogue establishes at the outset that the Eucharistic Prayer is prayed in the person and power of the Lord who is with the Church, and in the name of the whole assembly and indeed of the whole Church in heaven and on earth. All are invited, in the biblical term, to lift up their hearts, that is, to raise up and place in God's presence their entire being, thoughts, memories, emotions, and expectations, in grateful attention and anticipation.

- The voice, gestures, and stance, the entire demeanour of the priest celebrant help to convey the importance and the urgency of this invitation. This may be most effectively achieved by singing.
- Before the dialogue, the priest may introduce the Eucharistic Prayer by suggesting very briefly particular motives for thanksgiving.

Preface

191 The praise and thanksgiving from which the entire Eucharist takes its name is especially concentrated in the "preface", which proclaims the Church's thanks for the saving work of God. In the Eastern tradition this is a fixed part of the Eucharistic Prayer, beginning the praise of God and the rehearsal of God's mighty deeds that continue throughout the prayer. In the Roman tradition the preface has been a variable element, stressing one aspect of God's saving work according to the day, the feast, the season, or the occasion. In the current English edition over eighty such prefaces from ancient and more recent sources are provided for use with Eucharistic Prayers I, II, and III.

- The preface is not a preliminary to the Eucharistic Prayer, but the first part of it. It indicates a proclamation, a speaking out before God and the faithful, rather than a foreword or prelude. For this reason it is most appropriately sung.

- The Eucharistic Prayer is always expressed in the first person plural. It is the whole assembly of the faithful that joins itself to Christ in acknowledging the great things God has done and in offering the Sacrifice, even when one voice speaks in the name of all. It is the responsibility of the priest, acting in the person of Christ, the head of the Church, to proclaim the prayer with and for the people, to engage their attention, and to elicit their involvement throughout.
- Eucharistic Prayer II has a proper preface, based like the rest of the prayer on an ancient Roman model, but other prefaces may be substituted for it, especially those which summarise the mystery of salvation, such as the Common Prefaces.
- Eucharistic Prayer IV is constructed on an Eastern model. Its preface is a fixed and integral part of the prayer, whose themes continue beyond the Sanctus. For this reason, it is always to be used with its own preface. This is also true of the four forms of the Eucharistic Prayer for Various Needs and Occasions, and the Eucharistic Prayers for Masses with Children.

Sanctus Acclamation

192 In this acclamation the assembly joins its voice to that of all creation in giving glory to God, with words inspired by the vision of Isaiah (6:3). In each celebration of the Eucharist, the Church is taken up into the eternal liturgy in which the entire communion of saints, the heavenly powers, and all of creation give praise to the God of the universe.

- This acclamation is an integral part of the Eucharistic Prayer. It belongs to priest and people together. Of its very nature it is a song and should be sung, even if on occasion the preface is not sung. Choir or cantor parts may also be sung if they facilitate and enhance the congregation's participation.
- Settings of the Sanctus Acclamation, together with Memorial Acclamation and Amen should form a unity which reflects the unity of the whole Eucharistic Prayer.

Epiclesis

193 In these sections of the prayer, before and after the narrative of institution, the Church invokes God's Spirit to hallow and consecrate the gifts, asking that they become the Body and Blood of Christ, and to gather those who receive them into a true communion of faith and love. Through the sanctifying power of the Holy Spirit the repetition of the Lord's words of institution is efficacious, the memorial of Christ's death and resurrection is effected, and the Church is built up again as the body of Christ in the world.

- The life-giving power of the Spirit, who moved over the waters in the first days of creation and overshadowed Mary in the moment of the incarnation, is vividly expressed by the ancient gesture of bringing together the hands with the palms downward and extended over the elements to be consecrated. When done with great gravity and deliberation, this gesture can reinforce powerfully the understanding of the words and of the Spirit's action. This is a laying on of hands and is the same sacramental gesture used in Ordination, Confirmation, the Anointing of the Sick, and the Sacrament of Reconciliation.
- In accord with ancient tradition, if there are concelebrating priests, they stretch out both their hands toward the elements. The gesture made by the concelebrants should not be exaggerated, drawing attention to the action of the concelebrants. The full impact of their gesture is best conveyed when the concelebrants simply and naturally accompany the gestures of the presider.

Institution Narrative and Consecration

194 At the heart of the Eucharistic Prayer, the account of the Last Supper is recited. The words of Jesus, in which he gave himself to his disciples as their food and drink, are now repeated in the context of this prayer of praise. In the power of the Spirit, these words achieve what they promise and express: the presence of Christ and his Sacrifice among his people assembled. Everything for which God has been thanked and praised, all that was accomplished in the history of salvation, is summed up and made present in the person of the crucified and risen Lord.

- This narrative is an integral part of the one continuous prayer of thanksgiving and blessing. It should be proclaimed in a manner which does not separate it from its context of praise and thanksgiving.
- As a narrative it is also recited for the benefit of the assembly. It should therefore be proclaimed reverently, audibly, and intelligibly.
- On concluding the words over the bread, the priest shows the Body of the Lord to the people, and subsequently does the same with the chalice. The scale of the gesture will be indicated by the size and situation of the assembly. The gesture should be deliberate and reverent, but not prolonged, for this would affect the unity and continuity of the Eucharistic Prayer. It is most desirable that this gesture of ‘showing’ be quite distinct from the elevation, which forms part of doxology of the prayer.
- The bread must not be broken during the institution narrative. The Eucharistic Prayer is not a dramatic presentation of the Lord’s Supper but a thanksgiving prayer offered in remembrance of that event and the other saving events of the Paschal Mystery. It is about anamnesis not mimesis. The bread that has become the Body of the Lord is not broken until the fraction rite, the Breaking of the Bread.

Memorial Acclamation

195 The Memorial Acclamation of the people in the Eucharistic Prayer confesses the Church’s belief in the central mystery of our faith, the Paschal Mystery of Christ’s death, resurrection, and presence among his people.

- The Memorial Acclamations provided are not specific to any Eucharistic Prayers; each may be used with any of the prayers.
- As acclamations they are intended to be sung.
- The memorial acclamation should not be replaced by other texts.

Anamnesis and Offering

196 The whole action of the Eucharist is done in obedience to the Lord’s command, as a memorial of him, recalling especially his blessed Passion, glorious Resurrection, and Ascension into heaven. The Church understands this memorial as a living representation before God of the saving deeds which God has accomplished in Christ, so that their fullness and power may be effective here and now. In this memorial representation, the Church offers the one Sacrifice of praise and thanksgiving, a sacramental offering of the Sacrifice made “once for all” by Christ, the “holy and living Sacrifice” that “brings salvation to all the world.” It is an offering made by the whole Church, but especially by those here and now assembled who, in the power of the Holy Spirit, offer themselves with and through Christ, the Victim and Priest who joins the Church’s offering to his own.

Intercessions

197 By the grace of the Holy Spirit, the Church has become a single offering in Christ to the glory of God the Father. It now prays that the fruits of this Sacrifice may be experienced throughout the Church and the world. (In Eucharistic Prayer I, the intercessions are divided, some before, some after the institution narrative.) The Blessed Virgin Mary and the Saints are named as the prime examples of the fruits of this redemptive Sacrifice and as forerunners in the communion of the living and the dead. Praying in communion with Mary and the other saints of God, the assembly now intercedes for the living and the dead in union with the Lord, who for ever lives to make intercession (see Hebrews 7:25).

- Local patrons or saints whose Feast or memory is being celebrated may be mentioned in the intercessions of Eucharistic Prayer III.

Doxology

198 Faithful to the Jewish pattern of prayer known and used by Jesus and his disciples, the Eucharistic Prayer concludes where it began, with an ascription of praise and glory to God, which is endorsed and ratified by all present in their acclamation Amen. Saint Paul considered this ratification by the assembly to be essential to the thanksgiving prayer (see 1 Corinthians 14:15-16), and early Christian writers laid great stress on it as the people's confirmation of all that was proclaimed on their behalf by the priest.

199 Through Christ, with him, and in him, all is turned to the Father's glory by the action of the Holy Spirit. At this climax of the prayer the consecrated elements are raised high in a gesture that vividly expresses the true nature of the Eucharistic Sacrifice as the offering of the Church through Christ the High Priest, with Christ, who is really present in the Church, in Christ, who has incorporated his people into himself by the action of the Holy Spirit.

- The Doxology is part of the Eucharistic Prayer rather than an acclamation. As such it is proper to the prayer spoken or sung by the priest alone. The lay faithful participate in this prayer in faith and silence, and then through their acclamation, the Great Amen.
- The profound importance of the assembly's ratification and acclamation can be difficult to bring out in the one short word Amen. It should be sung or at the very least spoken loudly both at the Sunday and weekday celebrations. Musical settings which prolong the Amen or repeat it can all help the assembly to experience and express its true power.
- At the conclusion of the Eucharistic Prayer, the priest should make a distinct pause to make clear that the Eucharistic Prayer (the "giving thanks") is complete and that the Communion Rite (the "breaking and sharing") is about to begin.