

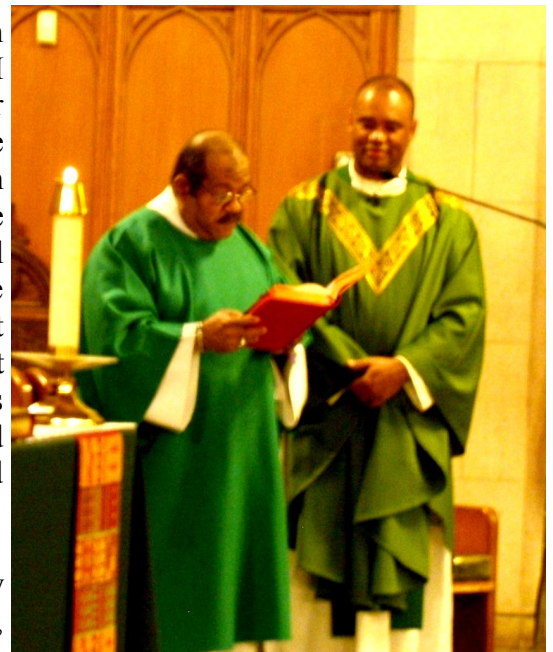
The Mass In Slow Motion

Volume — 16

The Prayer of the Faithful

The Mass In Slow Motion is a series on the Mass explaining the meaning and history of what we do each Sunday. This series of flyers is an attempt to add insight and understanding to our celebration of the Sacred Liturgy. This series will follow the Mass in order beginning with The Gathering Rite through The Final Blessing and Dismissal, approximately 25 volumes. Previous editions are available via the rectory office or our website: www.hcscchurch.org

We've got to pray! Where would the world be today if the Church wasn't praying? I don't know if we'd be here to talk about it. I have always suspected that we have been saved from nuclear annihilation due to the fact that some of the Cloistered Sisters have been praying for us. Our prayers change world history. Our parish church is on a very prominent street in the Nation's Capital. At one end of the street is the U.S. Capitol, some blocks up East Capitol Street is our parish. And you have heard it said before from the pulpit of this church that the most important building on East Capitol Street is NOT the U.S. Capitol, it is Holy Comforter – Saint Cyprian Parish. That's because it is prayer that really changes things. The politicians up the street can only make a good difference if we've got their back. So the Church must pray and this brings us to the Prayer of the Faithful.



In the Prayer of the Faithful, the people respond in a certain way to the word of God which they have welcomed in faith and, exercising the office of their baptismal priesthood, offer prayers to God for the salvation of all. It is fitting that such a prayer be included, as a rule, in Masses celebrated with a congregation, so that petitions will be offered for the holy Church, for civil authorities, for those weighed down by various needs, for all men and women, and for the salvation of the whole world. As a rule, the series of intentions is to be:

1. For the needs of the Church;
2. For public authorities and the salvation of the whole world;
3. For those burdened by any kind of difficulty;
4. For the local community.

Nevertheless, in a particular celebration, such as Confirmation, Marriage, or a Funeral, the series of intentions may reflect more closely the particular occasion.



The Mass in Slow Motion: The Prayer of the Faithful

It is for the priest celebrant to direct this prayer from the chair. He himself begins it with a brief introduction, by which he invites the faithful to pray, and likewise he concludes it with a prayer. The intentions announced should be sober, be composed freely but prudently, and be succinct, and they should express the prayer of the entire community. They may be spoken by the deacon, a lector or, if they are sung, by the cantor. (GIRM 69-71)

History – These prayers were very common in the early Church occurring just about where we have them today. They followed the homily (recall the Creed was not said in the earlier days as a rule). All the Fathers of the Church make mention of them.

In the beginning this prayer was antiphonally recited by the priest and the assembly. Over time the deacon took a more prominent role, announcing the whole intention and then the faithful responded; Kyrie eleison (Lord have mercy) or some other acclamation.

The prayers endured up until about the close of the patristic period (ca 9th Century). Their disappearance seems to coincide with their evolution into a Kyrie Litany and their transfer to the beginning of the Mass. Here they eventually came to be regarded as an unnecessary appendage and were phased out by Pope Gregory—as we saw in an earlier post on the Kyrie and Penitential Rite (MISM 7 & 8). In the Western part of the Church they were retained only on Good Friday. In the East they were never dropped. Today they have been restored to their original place in the Mass.

Pastoral Reflections – They are called “general intercessions” since they extend beyond the needs and concerns of the local assembly. Further, please note that they are NOT called the “particular intercessions.” What sometimes happens in more extemporaneous settings is that certain very particular needs get expressed and the list can become endless. Thus, it is not appropriate here to pray, “For the friend of my Uncle Joe Smith’s sister who is recovering from hip surgery and is having a hard time due to her diabetes.” It is more appropriate to pray, “For all who are sick or struggling at this time.” Keep it general, is the rule, this is not the time for a full medical update on everyone’s cousin or sister or to read long lists of names of those who may be sick, or graduating, or getting married, etc.

To call these general intercessions the “Prayer of the Faithful” has some historical merit since catechumens and others were dismissed before the proclaiming of them. However, today it is more common to call them general intercessions since the whole Mass is really the prayer of the faithful. The priest, through his introductory prayer at the general intercessions, may link the intercessions to the readings and by his closing prayer may summarize them. This can help to place them in a clear context. To sing the intercessions where possible is a beautiful option and surely of ancient practice that is still practiced in the liturgies of the Eastern Church.