

The Mass In Slow Motion

Volume 19

The Preface Dialogue

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.hscchurch.org.



A short dialogue happens in the Mass just after the prayer over the gifts and before the singing of the Sanctus (Holy, Holy, Holy). It is called the “preface dialogue” and it is really quite remarkable in its sweeping vision and heavenly call. Part of the reason we miss it’s significance is that the translation of the Latin is difficult to accomplish in English. Allow me to give the current translation so you’ll recognize it and then render a more literal version of the Latin.

- **The Lord be with you**
- **And also with you**
- **Lift up your hearts**
- **We lift them up to the Lord**
- **Let us give thanks to the Lord our God**
- **It is right to give him thanks and praise**

A fairly familiar dialogue to be sure. But to some extent it fails to take wing because of the rather earthbound notion most moderns have of the Mass. Very few attending Mass today think much of the heavenly liturgy. Rather they are focused on their parish Church, the priest in front of them and the people around them. But this is NOT an adequate vision for the Mass. In the end there is only one liturgy, the one in heaven. There is only one altar, the one in heaven. There is only one High Priest, Jesus in heaven. In the Mass we are swept up into the heavenly liturgy. There with myriads of angels and saints beyond number we worship the Father through Jesus, with Jesus, and in Jesus. In the Mass we are swept into heaven!

With this in mind consider a more literal rendering of the preface dialogue. Pay attention especially to the middle dialogue:

- ***Dominus Vobiscum*** (The Lord be with you)
- ***et cum spiritu tuo*** (And with your Spirit)
- ***Sursum corda*** (Hearts aloft!)
- ***habemus ad Dominum*** (We have, to the Lord!)
- ***Gratias agamus, Dominio Deo nostro*** (Let us give thanks to the Lord our God)
- ***Dignum et justum est*** (It is right and just.)

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What is the celebrant really inviting us to do? After greeting us in the Lord he invites us to go to heaven! But remember the priest is in persona Christi (he is praying in the person of Christ). Hence, when he speaks it is really the Lord Jesus who speaks making use of the voice of the priest. And what does the Lord really say to us in the magnificent dialogue and preface that follows? Allow me to elaborate on the fuller meaning of this text:

“Let your hearts be taken up! Come and go with me to the altar that is in heaven where I, Jesus the great High Priest, with all the members of my body render perfect thanks to God the Father! You are no longer on earth, your hearts have been swept aloft into the great liturgy of heaven! Come up higher. By the power of my words you are able to come up higher! Since you have been raised to new life in Christ, seek the things that are above where I am at my Father’s right hand. Come up now and enter the heavenly liturgy. Hearts aloft!”

The congregation’s response is meant to be a joyful acknowledgment and acceptance of the Lord’s action in summoning us to the heavenly liturgy. Here, too, allow me to elaborate:



“We have our hearts lifted to the Lord. We have entered the Heavenly Liturgy by the power of your grace, for you, our Head, have taken us, the members of your body, there. We are in the heavenly realms with you, worshipping the Father and giving him perfect thanks and praise. It is right and just that we should do this through you, with you and in you!”

Then, the celebrant sings or says the preface wherein some specific things for which we are thankful are enumerated. The text of the preface changes based on the season or the saint or feast of the day. But it always ends in this or a similar manner: *And so with angels and archangels and the whole company of heaven we sing the unending hymn of your praise: Holy, Holy, Holy....* And thus we are reminded that our worship is caught up into the heavenly liturgy where our voices join innumerable angels and saints in the glorious act of praise. We are in heaven! Our hearts (our very selves) are aloft!

Hence, the Mass is never just the “11:00 a.m. Mass at Saint Cyprian.” It is the heavenly liturgy. Until recently Churches were designed to remind us that we were entering heaven. As we walk into older churches we are surrounded by windows and paintings that depict the angels and saints. Christ is at the center in the tabernacle. And all the elements that scripture speaks of as in the heavenly liturgy are on display not only in the building but in the celebration of the liturgy: candles, incense, an altar, the hymns that are sung, the Holy, Holy, Holy, the scroll is brought forward in the Book of Gospels, the lamb on the throne-like altar, the prostrations and kneelings of the saints before the Lord. All these things are described in the Book of Revelation, descriptions of the heavenly liturgy. None of these things are in our churches or the liturgy for arbitrary reasons. We are in the heavenly realms and the heavenly liturgy and so we see and experience heavenly things. Hearts aloft!