

The Mass In Slow Motion

Volume 20

The Eucharistic Prayer

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.



The Eucharistic Prayer, a prayer of thanksgiving and sanctification is the center and high point of the entire Mass. In an introductory dialogue (called The Preface) the priest invites the people to lift their hearts to God in prayer and thanksgiving. He unites them with himself in the prayer and addresses in their name to the Father through Jesus Christ.

The meaning of the prayer is that the whole congregation joins Christ (who is the true priest and celebrant) in acknowledging the works of God and in offering the sacrifice. All should listen to the Eucharistic Prayer in silent reverence and share in it by making the two acclamations, (the mystery of faith and the Great Amen).

The chief elements of the Eucharistic Prayer are these:

1. Preface of Thanksgiving: thanks and praise are expressed especially in the preface. In the name of the entire people of God, the priest praises the Father and gives Him thanks for the work of salvation or some special aspect of it in keeping with the day, feast, or season.
2. Sanctus: united with the angels and all the saints the congregation sings or recites the hymn sung in heaven, the Sanctus (Holy, Holy, Holy).
3. Epiclesis: in special invocations the Church calls on God's power in the Holy Spirit and asks that the gifts offered by us, through the priest, may be consecrated, that is that they may become the body and blood of Christ, and that the sacrament we receive may become a source of salvation for those who are to share in communion.
4. Narrative of the institution and consecration: in the words and actions of Christ, the sacrifice He instituted at the Last Supper is celebrated. Under the appearances of bread and wine Jesus offered His body and blood, gave them to His Apostles to eat and drink, and commanded them to carry on this mystery. We obey him and do here as he said.
5. Anamnesis (remembrance): in fulfillment of the command received from Christ, through the Apostles, the Church keeps His memorial by recalling especially His passion, resurrection and ascension. For Jesus said, not only should we "Do this..." but also that we should remember what he has done for us. We do this as we proclaim the mystery of faith and sing (or say), for example: Dying you destroyed our death, rising you restored our life, Lord Jesus, come in glory!
6. Offering: in this memorial, the Church offers the Christ back to the Father in the Holy Spirit. The Church's intention is that the faithful not only offer the spotless victim but also learn to offer themselves and daily to be drawn into ever more perfect union, through Christ the Mediator, with the Father and with each other, so that, at last, God may be all-in-all.

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7. Intercessions: the intercessions of the Eucharistic Prayer make it clear that the Eucharist is celebrated in communion with the whole Church of heaven and earth, and that the offering is made for the Church and all its members, living and dead, who are called to share in the salvation and redemption acquired by the body and blood of Christ. Thus, we make mention of our Church leaders, all the faithful, and those who have died.
8. Final Doxology: the praise of God the Father, through His Son Jesus, and in union with the Holy Spirit, is expressed in the doxology which is confirmed and concluded by the acclamation of the people who sing or say: "Amen!"

Historical Perspectives—The origins of the Eucharistic Prayer may be found in the series of table prayers required at every Jewish meal and in particular those required on the feast of the Passover. Through the meal, the various courses were served and there was the recitation of the Haggadah, which interpreted the meaning of the feast of the Passover making present God's liberating deeds of the past, and applied their power to those celebrating the feast. Toward the end of the meal, the head of the family prayed over a cup of wine, the Berakah, praising God all creation, salvation, and asked that his creative and redemptive action be continued and renewed.

It was in this context that the Lord Jesus prayed the First Holy Mass taking the traditional prayers and transposing them, giving them a new dimension and higher meaning.

During the earliest years of the Church, the Eucharistic Prayer began to be developed and enhanced. Explicit Christological points were included, and other enhancing elements were added, such as the invocation of the saints, thanksgiving, and intercessions were included.

By the 4th Century, the Eucharistic Prayer began to take on a fixed form which may have differed a bit according to different geographical regions. Unlike the Eastern part of the Church, in the Western Church, until this present Century there was only one Eucharistic Prayer called the Roman Canon. Although its preface might vary, the rest of the Canon was fixed in a form, which dates to Pope Gregory the Great (590-604). It has remained essentially unchanged since that time.

After the Second Vatican Council, alternative Eucharistic prayers were composed that could be used alongside the Roman Canon, which was now renamed Eucharistic Prayer I. Altogether, four such prayers were issued for use in this country by 1968. Still later, in 1975, two Eucharistic Prayers for reconciliation were issued, and in the 1980s, another as well.



Pastoral Implications—The Eucharistic Prayer is the center and high point of the whole celebration. The celebration is a celebration of the Church and consequently of all gathered for the Mass. It is wrong to think of the canon as the "priest's prayer." For, even though it is recited by the priest alone, the verb tense is third person, plural, "we." However, it must not be forgotten that the Church prays together as one people hierarchically assembled. Hence, the priest alone may proclaim this prayer for, acting in the person of Christ, the head of the body (Christ acting through the priest) speaks for the members of the body (the faithful). In the end, all the faithful proclaim their praise and assent by singing or saying, "Amen!"