

Although the Mass is one celebration, it is made up of two parts: the liturgy of the Word, and the liturgy of the Eucharist. We started our reflections on the liturgy of the Eucharist two weeks ago, and now our focus shifts to that moment we call the Eucharistic Prayer, which follows the presentation of the gifts and ends with the great Amen. There are several parts to the Eucharistic Prayer, and before we look at them, it would be helpful to understand the overall importance of this moment of the Mass with regard to our daily life.

You and I, and the entire world, were redeemed by the sacrifice of Jesus on the Cross, by his wholehearted, loving “yes” to the Father. This was his response to the Father at every moment of His life, but it is at the moment of His suffering and death that we see it in all its purity, beauty and glory. It is in and through the Eucharistic Prayer that the sacrificial “yes” of Jesus continues to resound throughout the world in every age and time. At each Mass we attend Jesus’ sacrificial “yes” is placed before us in order that His “yes” may become ours, that we may united with Him in His total self-offering to the Father, so that our lives may become “a living sacrifice in Christ.” (Eucharistic Prayer 1)

There are four Eucharistic Prayers that the Church can use in the Mass, and these prayers grew out of the celebrations of the Eucharist by the early Christians--some acquiring their essential form as early as the 3rd and 4th centuries.

Each Eucharistic Prayer begins with a **preface**, and the preface has 3 parts. There is first the **dialogue**, which the priest begins by saying: “The Lord be with you.” And you will respond, beginning in Advent, with: “And with your spirit.” By these words we are acknowledging the need for Christ’s presence in the priest and in the people gathered together as one Body in Christ. We need the Lord to be with us, and we pray for it, as we prepare to enter into the profound mystery of the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass.

Then the priest says: “Lift up your hearts.” And you respond: “We lift them up to the Lord.” As we offer this great prayer of the Mass with our lips, we do not want our hearts to be somewhere else. No, we want them to be with Lord, and so we try to withdraw and detach our minds and hearts from the cares and things of the world and lift them to the Lord. As Christopher Carstens and Douglas Martis put it in their book on the Mass: “The Church is directing our hearts at this moment to the core of life: the pierced heart of the Crucified, open for us during the sublime moment of the Eucharistic Sacrifice.”

The priest ends the dialogue with: “Let us give thanks to the Lord our God.” And starting in Advent, you will respond by saying: “It is right and just.” by these words we express the essence and meaning of the Eucharist: thanksgiving. The Eucharistic Prayer is an offering of thanksgiving to God for the gifts and blessings of creation and redemption. And at this particular moment of the Mass we have much for which to be grateful: grateful to God for sending his Son to save us; and thankful for the wonderful miracle of “transubstantiation” that is about to happen, when the bread and wine on the altar change and become the body and blood of Jesus. Then the preface continues with a longer **thanksgiving prayer** that expresses thanks for a specific aspect in God’s plan of creation and redemption.

At the end of the preface we break into the jubilant song we call the **sanctus**: “Holy, holy, holy Lord God of hosts . . .” By these words we ascend spiritually to the heights of heaven, joining our voices with the praise and worship of all the heavenly hosts. The words we use at this moment are from the prophet Isaiah and St. John the evangelist, who were given visions of God in His heavenly kingdom. In their visions they saw countless numbers of angels around the throne of God, adoring and crying out: Holy, holy, holy . . .” And the glory of God is so majestically and awesomely wonderful that some of the seraph nearest the throne cover their faces with their wings, while other heavenly hosts bow down on their faces. How fitting it is that we fall to our knees after this song of praise, bowing down in adoration with all the angels and saints. The sound of those kneelers dropping to the floor is heavenly music.

Starting in Advent, instead of saying “lord God of power and might,” we will be saying “Lord God of hosts.” The word ‘hosts’ signifies an army or multitude of angles and saints, and is therefore preferred because it best conveys the image of this great heavenly choir that accompanies our praise at every Mass. The Sanctus ends with the words that the people of Israel used to welcome Jesus into the city of Jerusalem on Palm Sunday: “Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord, Hosanna in the highest.” We too call “blessed” the One who comes to us in a special way by His Eucharistic presence and we anticipate with Joy His coming into our hearts.

We do not have time to cover all the parts of the Eucharistic Prayer that follows, but I will highlight a few. There is a special prayer that occurs before the words of consecration called the **epiclesis** prayer. This is a Greek word that means: to call upon. By the words of this prayer, together with the gesture of extending his hands over the bread and wine, the priest calls down the Holy Spirit upon the gifts--for it will be by the power of God’s Word and the Spirit that the miracle of transubstantiation will take place. In the third Eucharistic Prayer the new translation for the epiclesis will read: “Therefore, O Lord, we humbly implore you: by the same Spirit graciously make holy these gifts we have brought to you for consecration, that they may become the Body and Blood of your Son our Lord Jesus Christ . . .”

Then comes the **Institution Narrative and Consecration**: “This is my body . . . This is my blood . . .” Here, as Carstens and Martis put it, the words of Christ at the Last Supper now become the Church’s words at the Supper of the Lamb. “The priest, acting in the person of Christ, speaks in a real and sacramental way for Christ: there are not two voices, but one.” The Faithful at this moment unite themselves to Christ’s sacrifice, praying that His sacrifice become truly ours.

Following the consecration is our pronouncing of the **mystery of faith**, followed by the **Memorial acclamation**. The saving deeds of Christ that we remember--His death, resurrection and ascension--are now sacramentally present in our celebration so that we can receive their grace and power for our lives in the ‘today’ of the Church.

Then follows an **intercessory part**, where we call upon the prayers of the Angels and Saints, asking that the sacrifice we have just offered may bear its fruit in our lives,

especially that of unity in the Holy Spirit. We also pray for God's mercy and blessing upon the Church and the world, with a special prayer for all the faithful departed. We could never come close to imagining the grace and power of a single Mass. We want all whom we love and all who need our prayers to benefit from this universal act of redemption accomplished by Christ, celebrated and made present at every Mass.

The Eucharistic Prayer ends with the **Doxology** and **great Amen** - "Through him, and with him, and in him . . . all glory and honor is yours . . ." The two great ends of the Liturgy of the Church is that God be glorified, and that we become sanctified. And we seal this prayer with our act of faith by singing AMEN. Amen means: so be it, or, it is true. By our united "Amen," we are saying to God: We believe that all that you have promised to accomplish through the once-and-for-all-Sacrifice of Jesus Christ your Son, now represent upon our altar, is happening with us now, unfolding right here in our midst. Yes, it is true, it is wonderfully true.