

## THE EUCHARISTIC PRAYER

We continue Stewardship Month here at St. Mark the Evangelist, and our preaching on the Mass itself, that through a deeper understanding we might live the Mass Monday through Saturday. Living the Mass daily, not just on Sundays, is an act of faith and stewardship.

Now we come to the center and high point (the font and summit) of the entire celebration, the Eucharistic Prayer, a prayer of thanksgiving and sanctification. The Priest calls upon the people to lift up their hearts to the Lord in prayer and thanksgiving; he associates the people with himself in the Preface Prayer that he addresses in the name of the entire community to God the Father through Jesus Christ in the Holy Spirit. The meaning of this Preface is that the whole congregation of the faithful joins with Christ in recounting the great deeds of God and in the offering of Sacrifice. The Eucharistic Prayer requires that we listen actively, attentively, prayerfully, and with reverence.

There are ten different Eucharistic prayers in the Missal, but certain elements are common to all of them. Most obvious: This is a meal prayer, grace. God is given all thanks and praise, not in the abstract but at a table on which are the bread and wine intended for the food and drink of this assembly. So this prayer resonates with all the meal blessings we say in our daily lives. We have grown hungry and by God's grace are fed. All that we know about giving thanks we bring to this common table. Over the bread and wine the presider puts words to our thanks, and they become words about Christ. All our thanks gravitate toward the body given up for the life of the world, toward the blood of the new and everlasting covenant, blood that was shed for all that sins might be forgiven and death overcome. We call on the Holy Spirit to come upon these gifts and make them holy, make them for us the body and blood of our Lord, Jesus Christ. If we Catholics want to learn how to pray, then let us learn how to pray the Eucharistic prayer. Learn how to lift up our hearts and give God thanks and praise. Learn it here, at this table, gathered close to one another, gazing at simple bread and good wine.

Each of the ten Eucharistic Prayers are woven together with some common threads:

The thanksgiving, expressed especially in the Preface, in which the Priest, in the name of all those who gather, glorifies God the Father and gives thanks to him for all the work of salvation or for some particular aspect of it, according to the varying day, celebration, or season of the church year.

The acclamation, by which the whole congregation, joining with the heavenly powers, sings the Sanctus (the Holy, Holy, Holy). This acclamation is proclaimed by all the people with the Priest.

The epiclesis, in which, the priest acting in the person of Christ calls down the presence and power of the Holy Spirit that the gifts made and offered by human hands be consecrated, that they become Christ's Body and Blood, and that the sacrificial Victim to be received in Communion may be for the salvation of those who will consume it.

The institution narrative and Consecration, by which, through the words and actions of Christ, that Sacrifice is accomplished which Christ himself instituted during the Last Supper, when he offered his Body and Blood under the appearance of bread and wine, gave them to the Apostles to eat and drink, and leaving them with the command to "do this in memory of me."

The anamnesis: a remembering, in which the Church, fulfilling the command that she received from Christ through the Apostles, celebrates the memorial of Christ, recalling especially his Passion, Resurrection, and Ascension into heaven.

The oblation: by which, the Church, in particular those gathered here and now, offers the sacrificial Victim, Jesus Christ, in the Holy Spirit to the Father. The Church's intention is that the faithful not only offer this sacrificial Victim but also learn to offer their very selves, and so day by day to be brought, through the mediation of Christ, into unity with God and with each other, so that God may at last be all in all.

The intercessions: by which expression is given to the fact that the Eucharist is celebrated in communion with the whole Church, of both heaven and of earth, and that the oblation is made for her and for all her members, living and dead, who are called to participate in the redemption and salvation purchased by the Body and Blood of Christ. We pray for Church leaders and clergy, for the people gathered, for the intercession of the saints, and for the departed.

The final doxology [Through Him, with Him and in Him ...] concludes the Eucharistic Prayer, by which the glorification of God is expressed and which is affirmed and concluded by the people's great acclamation of "Amen."

It is the Eucharist that makes the Church. It is a prayer in which Creator and Creation meet, and created time and God's eternity come together, that the events of the Last Supper, the Passion, Death and Resurrection are made present for us, that simple bread and wine, the work of human hands, become the Body and Blood of Jesus Christ,

that sin and death would be overwhelmed by the loving mercy of God, and Heaven's doors opened for us forever.