



The Eucharistic Prayer, Center and Summit

The Eucharistic Prayer within the Mass is the “center and summit of the entire celebration.” Many of us however are more likely to think of this part of the Mass as the “long prayer that Father prays.” We may be engaged in the sung acclamations during the prayer or the scriptural account of the Last Supper but we may be more inclined to let our thoughts drift during the rest of this prayer. A better understanding of this prayer can bring us to a fuller appreciation of the very nature of the liturgy and our conscious participation in it.

The Office of Worship receives a number of calls each year from concerned parishioners who are questioning the particular Eucharistic Prayer texts that they have heard on Sunday. They hear unfamiliar words and worry about the authenticity of the text. Is Father saying the “right” words?

Actually, the Holy See has approved ten different versions of this prayer for use at Mass. It is normally the choice of the priest celebrant to select the particular Eucharistic Prayer that will be prayed at Mass.

Because Eucharistic Prayer III is recommended especially for use on Sundays, many of us hear it much more often than the other versions. This results in our being surprised when we hear another approved version of this prayer.

Most Catholics learned somewhere in their formative years that the twofold purpose of liturgy is to give honor and glory to God and to sanctify the people. Within the Mass, the Eucharistic Prayer explicitly expresses both of these elements.

Even though the Institution Narrative, the Last Supper account, is the centerpiece of the Eucharistic Prayer, it is only one of eight elements that make up the Eucharistic Prayer. Let’s focus on two of these elements that directly relate to the purpose of the liturgy: praise and thanksgiving to God and sanctification of the people.

The Eucharistic Prayer begins with the dialogue, “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.”

The origin of the word “eucharist” is a Greek word meaning, “to give thanks.”

In the first part of the prayer, the preface, the priest celebrant names those things for which we particularly want to give God thanks and praise.

These prefaces are usually related to the specific season or feast in the liturgical year. There are over 90 different prefaces given in the Roman Missal for use at Mass. In the Children’s Eucharistic Prayers, there is an option offering the children an opportunity to name the things for which they are most grateful.

At the conclusion of the preface all the assembly sings the *Sanctus* (Holy, Holy, Holy), the acclamation that joins the heavenly kingdom with the earthly kingdom in giving praise to God. We express at this time, the connection that we have with those that have gone before us.

The assembly stands for the first part of the Eucharistic Prayer, the preface and the *Sanctus*. The instruction for Mass then calls for us to kneel for the rest of the Eucharistic Prayer through the Doxology and Amen, (“Through him, with him, in him...Amen.”) We kneel “except when prevented on occasion by reasons of health, lack of space, large number of people present or some other good reason.”

After the period of thanksgiving, we call on the Holy Spirit to act in two ways: to change the bread and wine into the Body and Blood of Jesus Christ and to change us into the Body of Christ.

Every time we celebrate the liturgy we are asking God to transform not only bread and wine into Christ’s body and blood but also we are asking God’s Holy Spirit to transform us, to make us holy in order that we can become more Christ like. Theologians remind us that the first change is so that the second change can take place.

Our continual quest toward sanctification leads us to the realization of how we live out our baptismal identity. When we are dismissed at the end of Mass, we are sent out to live out our baptismal vocation to be Christ in the world. Our openness to God’s transformation enables us to respond to our responsibility to live in a Christian manner and to constantly use the gifts we have been given for the betterment of the world in which we live. The liturgy is indeed the source and summit of all the activity of the Church. Our only response is Christian stewardship.