

THE MASS (Part 4)

THE LITURGY OF THE EUCHARIST (Part B)

This consists of:- Preface, “Holy, Holy, Holy Lord”, Epiclesis, Narrative of the Institution, Memorial Acclamation, Anamnesis, Offering, Intercessions and Final Doxology.

INTRODUCTION: The Eucharistic Prayer is the centre and high point of the entire celebration of the Mass. It is a summary of what it means for the Church to celebrate the Eucharist. It is essentially a statement of **praise and thanksgiving** for God’s work of salvation and it is an action that truly and **actually makes present the Body and Blood** of the Lord. In language that is poetic and biblical the priest speaks to and on behalf of the whole of the assembly that has gathered together. The people give their assent by joining in the initial dialogue (*‘The Lord be with you. - And also with you. Lift up your hearts. We lift them up to the Lord....’*) and the acclamations (e.g.: *‘Christ has died. Christ is risen. Christ will come again.’*).

There is almost universal agreement that the origins of the Eucharistic Prayer are to be found in a series of **table prayers** required at every **Jewish meal**. Toward the beginning of the meal, the father of the family or the presiding member of the community uttered a Jewish prayer of blessing, known in Hebrew as a **berakah**, which blessed or praised God. Holding the bread, the presider prayed: *‘Blessed are you, Lord, our God, king of the world, who has brought bread from heaven’*. The bread was then broken and distributed to those present. The various courses of the meal then followed. Toward the end of the meal and over a cup of wine the presider said another - though more solemn and extensive - *berakah* which, after an initial dialogue, consisted of three sections:

1. Praise of God for all creation.
2. A thanksgiving.
3. Asking God to continue the divine creative and redemptive action.

Whether the Last Supper was an actual **Passover meal** has long been debated by expert theologians. Whether it was an actual Passover meal or not, the Last Supper had strong **Passover connotations** for the early Christians. But what is especially significant is that Jesus, while using the traditional meal *berakah*, gave them a completely **new dimension** with his words: *‘This is my Body’* and *‘This is my Blood’*.

Since that time, a **Eucharistic Prayer** has been used. For a long time, the priest had no set form of words, but followed a formula similar to that outlined below - with Jewish origins. From at least the 4th century or even earlier, up until the 1960’s there was only one Eucharistic Prayer. Today, that particular prayer is known as the

'**Roman Canon**', although it is better known as Eucharistic Prayer 1. In 1968 three other Eucharistic Prayers were published - **Eucharistic Prayers 2, 3 and 4**. Numbers 2 & 4 had origins in earlier Prayers - e.g. No. 2 was known as the Prayer of Hippolytus. In 1974 three **Eucharistic Prayers for Children** were published and in 1975 two **Eucharistic Prayers for Reconciliation** were published. In 1995, 4 more Eucharistic Prayers – the Prayers for Various Needs and Occasions - known colloquially as the **Swiss Eucharistic Prayers** (because that is where they originated) - were approved for use in Australia. The themes that are common to all these Eucharistic Prayers are:-

1. Thanksgiving.
2. Acclamation.
3. Epiclesis.
4. Narrative of the institution and consecration.
5. Anamnesis.
6. Offering.
7. Intercessions.
8. Final doxology.

There are various times and occasions at which the individual Eucharistic Prayers may be used. E.G. the **Prayers for Children** can only be used at Masses that are specifically celebrated for children. Therefore they cannot be used at Sunday Mass. Of the four main Prayers, **number 4** has its own unchangeable preface. It may be used when a prayer has no preface of its own – e.g. on weekdays in Lent and Easter and on Sundays in Ordinary Time.

Number 2 has its own preface and should be used mainly on weekdays, but on rare occasions, for pastoral reasons, may be used on Sundays. Most priests try to use a **variety** of Eucharistic Prayers so the congregation can benefit from the **richness** of each Prayer.

PREFACE: Although praise and thanksgiving are a part of the whole of the Eucharistic Prayer, these two elements appear strongly in the Preface, a term which means '*proclamation*' or '*speaking out*' before God and the People of God. The Preface begins with an initial dialogue: (*The Lord be with you. And also with you. Lift up your hearts...*) The body of the Preface is a statement of the special reason for praising God, especially God's work in creation and redemption. The missal now contains a rich variety of eighty individual prefaces for feast days, liturgical seasons, votive Masses and special occasions.

In this solemn beginning of the Eucharistic Prayer, then, the whole assembly, through the priest, blesses and praises God. In the **introductory dialogue** the people are made conscious of their **close union** with the officiating priest through the prayer dialogue referred to in the last paragraph.

“HOLY, HOLY, HOLY LORD”: This text is inspired by the vision of Isaiah 6:2-3, and was sung in the morning office of the Jewish synagogue. It was in the Eastern part of the Church that it first became a part of the Eucharistic Prayer. By the 5th century it was included in the Eucharistic Prayer in the West. The verse *‘Blessed is He’* is the acclamation used by the people to greet Christ at his solemn entrance into Jerusalem (Matthew 21:9).

In this acclamation, the people **respond** to the priest’s **invitation** to join all creation in giving praise to God through Jesus Christ. With one voice the whole community gives glory to God.

PETITION (EPICLESIS): The final section of the Jewish table prayer over the cup contains a **petition**, looking forward to the **future**, which requests, for the Jewish People, the re-establishment of the house of David. Such a request would have made it quite natural for the early Christians to mention the Holy Spirit toward the end of the Eucharistic Prayer. There soon developed a formal petition that the Spirit come upon the community and upon the bread and wine. Such an invocation is technically known as an **epiclesis** - a **“calling upon”** or a *‘calling over here’*. God the Father, to whom all prayers of the Mass are addressed, is requested to send the Holy Spirit who brings about such fruits of the Eucharist as **unity** and **love** among the people.

Another form of epiclesis, occurring before the words of institution, requests that God accept the **sacrifice**, and that it be filled with the blessing of the Holy Spirit. In the 1st Eucharistic Prayer there are the words that petition God to *‘Accept and bless these gifts...’* and that they become an *‘offering in spirit and in truth...the Body and Blood of Jesus Christ’*. In the 2nd and 3rd Eucharistic Prayers, the Father is petitioned to send the Holy Spirit to **‘Make holy’**, or, in the 4th Eucharistic Prayer, to **‘sanctify’** the gifts so that they may become the Body and Blood of the Lord. As the priest makes this petition, he extends his **hands** over the bread and wine in the **ancient gesture** signifying the **giving of the Spirit**. Later, in Eucharistic Prayers 2, 3 & 4, the priest invokes the Spirit and asks that all *‘be brought together in unity’* (2), *‘become one body, one spirit in Christ’* (3), and that *‘all who share this bread and wine’* be gathered *‘into the one body of Christ, a living sacrifice of praise’* (4).

NARRATIVE OF THE INSTITUTION: The words of the institution or **consecration** are **essential** to the Eucharistic Prayer. Their ancient liturgical usage is already reflected in the **scriptural** accounts of the Last Supper which borrowed the phrasing of these words from actual Eucharistic celebrations of the apostolic (early) Church. The **elevation of the host** at the institution narratives dates from the early 13th century. The **elevation of the chalice** as well as a **genuflection** after the consecration of the bread and after the

consecration of the wine appeared in the late 14th century. The elevation (lifting up) of the host and chalice began because churches had become so large that people could not see what was happening on the altar. Many had also given up the practice of frequent communion and relied on **prayerful adoration** of the elevated host/chalice for a 'spiritual communion'. This prayerful adoration is still important for Catholics who are unable to receive Holy Communion because they are not in a state of Grace, and also for non-Catholics.

Bells: As churches grew larger, bells were also used to alert the congregation to the most solemn parts of the Mass. This was also necessary because, by this time, the priest had his back to the people and they couldn't see much of what was happening. Bells, then and now, also give **honour** and respect to the solemn moments when the Body and Blood of Christ become present on the altar.

In our time, all of the Eucharistic Prayers have the **same words of institution**: (*Take this all of you and eat it, this is my body which will be given up for you. and for the wine Take this all of you and drink from it...*). However, the narrative - the words surrounding the above - differs slightly, depending on which Eucharistic Prayer is chosen.

All that God has accomplished in creation and salvation history is **fulfilled, signified** and **made present** in the person of the crucified and risen Christ. Christ's words are a promise, and through the power of the Holy Spirit they **accomplish what they signify: his Eucharistic Body and Blood, his "Real Presence"**.

Many people hold an erroneous belief that the words: *'This is my Body.... This is my Blood'* are all that is necessary for the bread and wine to become the Body and Blood of Christ. However, it is the whole Eucharistic Prayer and not just the words of institution which bring about the miraculous change from bread and wine to Christ's Body and Blood. Only a **validly ordained bishop or priest** is able to utter the words of any part of the entire Eucharist Prayer.

MEMORIAL ACCLAMATION: The people show that they **actively participate** in the Eucharistic Prayer through the memorial acclamation. Sharing in the Eucharist by virtue of their baptism, the people **express and affirm belief** that the whole mystery of the Risen Christ is present and active in the celebration. All four acclamations express the mystery of Christ dying, rising and present among his people. Acclamations 1 and 2 are based on a formula borrowed from the Syrian Rite (one of the Church's Eastern Rites), and recall the death, resurrection and second coming of Christ. The 3rd acclamation, almost word for word, echoes 1 Corinthians 11:26. The 4th acclamation is the only acclamation which does not mention the final coming of Christ.

ANAMNESIS: Anamnesis is Greek for “**Memory**”. The Passover is a feast whose participants make memory of the whole saving and liberating action of God in the historical past. Jesus uttered his command – ‘*Do this in memory of me*’. So, from the earliest of times, the Church has, through the words of the Eucharistic Prayers, **remembered** the death, resurrection and ascension of Jesus. The **Jewish** understanding of ‘**memory**’ or ‘remember’ **means the BRINGING PRESENT OF THE ACTUAL EVENT** - and **not just a recollection** of the said event. This is crucial to our Catholic understanding and belief that it is the **ACTUAL sacrifice of the Last Supper and Calvary** that we celebrate on our altars each day, and not just a commemoration or remembering of those sacrificial events.

OFFERING: There is only one offering action in the Mass and it is celebrated during the Eucharistic Prayer. It is an offering made by the whole Church, but especially by the community gathered in faith. In a prayer of praise to God, priest and people **offer themselves with and through Jesus**. Usually the offering is linked to the anamnesis and is an explicit declaration that the people, with and through the priest, are offering the ‘bread and cup’ or some other elaborated equivalent. Eucharistic Prayer 2 speaks of offering ‘*this life-giving bread, this saving cup*’ and Prayer 3 refers to ‘*this holy and living sacrifice*’.

INTERCESSIONS: The Jewish blessing prayer over the cup included various formulas requesting God to show mercy upon the people of Israel; to send Elijah and the Messiah; and to restore the house of David. Hence, it is not surprising that at an early period, the Eucharistic Prayer came to include intercessions for various categories of people. Today we pray for the Church, the Pope, the local Bishop, certain members of the living and those assembled. We pray for **intercessory prayers from Mary and the Saints** -- and towards the end of the Eucharistic Prayer, we pray for **those who have died**.

Praying for the **Pope** by name identifies and acknowledges our ‘communion’ or ‘**unity**’ with the **Vicar of Christ**; while praying for the **Bishop** by name makes the same connection of ‘communion’ and ‘**unity**’ with the successor of the Apostles who is charged with shepherding our ‘local church’ or ‘**diocese**’.

FINAL DOXOLOGY: The final doxology: (*‘Through him, with Him, in Him...’*) summarises the Eucharistic Prayer which concludes as it began, on an explicit note of praise. The priest has proclaimed the Eucharistic Prayer on behalf of the people and the people confirm and approve of this by responding ‘*amen*’ or ‘*so be it*’ or ‘*we believe all that has been prayed*’. The Body and Blood of the Lord are raised high in a gesture of offering and honour. The **doxology** is an **integral part** of the **Eucharistic Prayer**. Hence, like the rest of the Eucharistic Prayer, it is spoken by the priest(s) alone. In some

places, a serious error has occurred in recent times wherein all the people join the priest in saying or singing the doxology. This betrays a lack of understanding of the meaning of this prayer as a **part of the 'priestly' prayer** of the Eucharist.

NEXT WEEK: the Communion Rite & the Concluding Rite.