

# WHY DO WHAT WE DO AT MASS???

## THE EUCHARISTIC PRAYER

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### Pastoral Considerations

There are two actions – one action that prepares the assembly to pray; the second action is the prayer itself.

- Taken: the bread and wine are placed on the Altar.
- Blessed: the Eucharistic Prayer is prayed.

The Last Supper took place within a Jewish context and all subsequent celebrations of the Eucharist (The Mass) reflect our Jewish heritage. The Jews, historically conscious of God's good deeds, had a special way of "remembering." Unfortunately, in the English language there is not a good way to convey this concept. "Remembering" was not merely a calling to mind "in the head" but more a sense of making "present once again" the saving deeds of God and giving thanks again and again for God's continuing activity in the lives of his beloved people. Keeping this in mind will help us focus on the most precious gift we receive in the Eucharist, not just a memory of an event long ago or a mere sign of something to come, but the very Body and Blood of the Risen Christ – present.

### The Structure of the Eucharistic Prayer

First, the Liturgy of the Eucharist begins with the gifts of bread and wine being brought to the altar. We do not participate merely as observers of the procession of bread, wine and other offerings for the poor. To understand our role, let us ask the question from St. Cyprian: "Who comes to the Lord's Supper without a sacrifice, and yet takes part of the sacrifice which the poor man has offered?" Each and every person at the Catholic Community of Pleasanton should reflect upon this a question and act accordingly prior to Mass to ensure that real and felt sacrifices are united concretely to the spiritual offering that is presented in this procession. In other words, what are you bringing to the table?

These gifts are "taken" as signs of the sacrificial offerings of the people and placed on the Altar by the priest and deacon. The gifts are brought to be taken.

Second, the preface of the Eucharistic Prayer begins with the dialogue to illustrate the depth of our offering:

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| • The Lord be with you...                   | <i>And with your spirit.</i>        |
| • Lift up your hearts...                    | <i>We lift them up to the Lord.</i> |
| • Let us give thanks to the Lord our God... | <i>It is right and just.</i>        |

In the preface dialogue, the priest invites the assembly heavenward as we acclaim and give thanks for the Christ, the Virgin Mary, and others. And in giving thanks and praise to God, we do so in the company of all the saints and angels. There are close to 100 prefaces that can be used. Some are seasonal prefaces for Advent, Christmas, Lent, Easter, and Ordinary Time. Other prefaces are used to give thanks for Apostles, Martyrs, or Doctors of the Church, to name a few. The preface culminates in singing the Sanctus (Holy, Holy, Holy Lord).

Third, the main body of the Eucharistic Prayer leads to the *epiclesis*. The priest prays the Father in Heaven to **send** the Holy Spirit to make holy the offerings of bread and wine so that they may become the Body and Blood

of Christ. In the midst of the priest offering the bread and wine to become really and substantially Christ's Body and Blood, we hear phrases that deepen awareness that we are also offering ourselves at the altar. Some examples:

- *Graciously accept this oblation of our service.*
- *We offer to your glorious majesty from the gifts you have given us.*
- *It is truly right and just, our duty and our salvation.*
- *To all who partake of this one Bread and one Chalice that, gathered into one body by the Holy Spirit, they may become a living sacrifice in Christ to the praise of your glory.*

By these words we can see very clearly that the Church's tradition understands that we are not removed from this offering of the bread and wine that become Christ's Body and Blood. We are enveloped by this offering.

If we call to mind the life-giving events of our salvation, then we do more than remember the Last Supper. The Sacrifice of Jesus Christ on the cross is truly present. Jesus is not crucified once again at the celebration of the Eucharist, but his sacrifice is made present for us. Because He is present for us, we offer our lives of service along with the Body and Blood of Christ to the Father. In offering our lives of service, we celebrate the Holy Spirit **animating** the members of the Church throughout human history to be a sacrifice of praise and thanksgiving. This is called the *anamnesis*. We pray, therefore, the presence of the saints to be in our midst, especially St. Augustine and St. Elizabeth Seton. All those who have been nourished by the body and blood of Christ will be with us as we are nourished.

Fourth, an illuminating part of the prayer is worth underscoring. In each Eucharistic Prayer there is always a remembrance of all the faithful departed. It should be a consolation to those who have experienced the loss of a loved one that we are united with them even in death through the Eucharist banquet. Those who have died see the Lord face to face; we receive the same Lord under the forms of bread and wine while living on earth. Heaven and earth are united.

The Eucharistic Prayer is summed up in a great Doxology. The priest prays: "Through him, and with him, and in him..." This prayer gives praise and glory to God, in a special way, to the three divine Persons of the Trinity – to the Father, through the Son, in the Holy Spirit.

Those at mass and the whole Church, in fact, respond with a resounding "Amen." Since we pray what we believe, the Great Amen which should be sung with firm conviction. This is the culmination, the capstone of the Eucharistic Prayer.