



WELCOMING THE ROMAN MISSAL 3RD EDITION

Part VII -- Overview of the Mass

The Eucharistic Prayer

Third Edition of the Roman Missal

Many of the responses that the people are asked to make during the Eucharistic Prayer will not change with the advent of the revised Roman Missal: the Great Amen & the Lamb of God (Agnus Dei) will remain the same.

Two things that will be changing are the Holy, Holy, Holy (Sanctus) and the Memorial Acclamation.

The opening line of the Sanctus will change from “Holy, holy, holy Lord, God of power and might” to “Holy, Holy, Holy Lord God of **hosts**.”

The first thing we see with the Mystery of Faith is a change to the priests’ introduction. He will introduce it simply with the words “The mystery of faith.” We will respond with one of three options. A fourth option, which is available in our present Sacramentary, will no longer be available for use after November 27: “Christ has died, Christ has risen, Christ will come again”. This option does not follow the pattern of addressing Christ. Rather, it simply states what Christ as done.

*Published by the
Office of Worship for the
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On November 27, 2011, English-speaking Catholics in the United States will begin using a new translation of the Roman Missal (the book containing the prescribed prayers, chants, and instructions for the celebration of Mass in the Roman Catholic Church).

The Eucharistic Prayer is “the center and summit of the entire celebration” of the Mass. We trace the origins of the eucharistic prayer to a Jewish prayer, known as the “berakah” -- a prayer of praise and thanksgiving. This prayer form would have been familiar to Jesus and shaped his prayer at the Last Supper.

The Prayer of the Church

The eucharistic prayer is a statement of joyful praise and thanksgiving which summarizes what it means for us to celebrate the eucharist. Although it is the task of the ordained priest to lead this prayer and to address the Father in the name of Christ, we must not forget that he does so on our behalf. As the wording of the prayers remind us, it is “we” who praise, it is “we” who give thanks. It is everyone present who joins Christ in acknowledging the works of God and in offering the sacrifice. As we move through the prayer, we respond to what the priest proclaims. We sing the Holy, Holy at the end of the Preface. We sing the Memorial Acclamation after the account of the Last Supper. And we affirm and conclude the whole prayer with our Great Amen. This is a prayer that belongs to us all. We offer it to the Father together, united with Christ our head.

History of the Eucharistic Prayer

The Roman Church for centuries knew only one eucharistic prayer, the Roman Canon (also known as Eucharistic Prayer I). This prayer can be traced back in written texts to the 4th Century. As part of the initial reforms after Vatican II, three more Eucharistic Prayers were approved -- Eucharistic Prayers II, III and IV. More recently, the Holy See has granted permission for the use of other Eucharistic Prayers: Eucharistic Prayers for Reconciliation I and II, Eucharistic Prayers for Masses with Children I, II and III, and the Eucharistic Prayer for Mass for Various Needs and Intentions. So, there are today ten Eucharistic Prayers.

The essential elements are found in each of the Eucharistic Prayers. The words of Consecration and of the Final Doxology are the same in every Eucharistic Prayer. Also common to each prayer are the following elements: thanksgiving (preface), acclamation (Sanctus), epiclesis (invocation of the Holy Spirit), narrative of the institution and consecration, anamnesis (“memorial” of the passion and of the whole mystery of Christ), offering, intercessions, and final statement of praise (concluding doxology).

Thanksgiving: The eucharistic prayer begins with a statement of praise and thanksgiving called the “preface”. (“Preface” in this instance means “proclamation” or “speaking out”.) The preface reminds us that the Eucharistic Prayer is a prayer of thanks and praise. “Let us give thanks to the Lord our God. It is right and just.” This is also reflected in the very name of the prayer; the word Eucharist, you may recall, comes from the Latin for thanksgiving.

The preface concludes with an acclamation sung by the people: the “Holy, Holy, Holy Lord”, taken from Isaiah’s vision of the heavenly kingdom and from Matthew’s account of Palm Sunday.

Invocation: The technical term is “epiclesis”, from the Greek word meaning a “calling upon” or a “calling over here.” We pray that the Holy Spirit will come in power to sanctify and transform our gifts and ourselves. As the presider calls upon the Spirit to change the bread and the wine, he extends his hands, palms down, over the elements. This is an ancient gesture, found in almost every sacrament, requesting that God’s power be with us. In both word and gesture we pray: Come!

Narrative of the Institution: The retelling in words of what Christ did at the Last Supper is called the institution narrative. The narrative repeats Christ’s words. Through the power of the Spirit they bring about what they signify, namely his eucharistic body and blood, his real presence.

Remembering: “Anamnesis” is the Greek word for “memory.” This is not the type of memory which fondly looks back at the past. Rather, it is akin to what the Jewish people experience at Passover. It is a liturgical remembering that is so psychologically intense and believing that the past is indeed made present.

Offering: We offer ourselves as we enter into union with the offering of Christ. What is offered is our sacrifice of praise which is incorporated in the offering made once and for all by Christ.

Intercessions: We are reminded that the eucharist extends beyond our parish, our diocese, our country. It is celebrated in communion with the whole Church of heaven and earth, and so we pray for the whole Church, the pope, the diocesan bishop, ourselves, the living and the dead.

Doxology: The prayer is brought to an end with the final doxology or statement of praise. As the eucharistic cup and bread are raised in a gesture of offering, the assembly, through the priest, explicitly restates the whole purpose of the eucharistic prayer, namely to offer praise and honor to the father through Christ and in the Holy Spirit. We make this statement our own by singing an exuberant “Amen,” the most important acclamation of the eucharistic prayer. With our “amen”, we affirm and give assent to what has been proclaimed, to what has been done.

A Truth of Enormous Significance

During the Eucharistic Prayer, not only does Christ become present, Body and Blood, soul and divinity under the forms of bread and wine, but Christ’s saving action-- his passion, death and resurrection -- are once again enacted. Although difficult to grasp, this is a truth of enormous significance. The action of Christ which brought about our redemption, the action he offered once and for all on Calvary becomes present again for us here and now, in this time and place. We are not simply retelling the story or re-enacting historical events. The sacrifice of the altar and the sacrifice of the cross are one and the same. What’s more, in every celebration of the Mass, we have the opportunity to become part of Christ’s perfect offering. In union with the priest, we offer Christ and we offer ourselves -- we offer our lives, our efforts to do the will of God, our efforts to grow more like Christ, as well as our efforts as a community of believers to spread God’s Word and serve God’s people. Most wonderful of all, although we know that our offering is imperfect, when it is joined with the offering of Christ it becomes part of his perfect praise and thanksgiving. By our close attention to the words and meaning of the entire Eucharistic Prayer, by praying it as our own, we join Christ’s perfect offering to the Father, and with Christ we offer ourselves to the Father.

Discussion Questions

1. Why is the Eucharistic Prayer referred to as the “center and summit of the entire celebration” of the Mass?
2. How is the Eucharistic Prayer a prayer that belongs to us all?
3. What does it mean that the sacrifice of the altar and the sacrifice of the cross are one and the same?