

The New Missal Series, Part Five: Transforming power of God's love

The Eucharistic prayer is the high point of the Mass and the most profound prayer that the church can offer. We can never understand nor appreciate fully the Mystery, the great love that God shows us in this marvelous exchange. We offer to God the gifts of bread, wine and ourselves, and God returns to us the body of Christ, his living Presence among us. The Eucharistic prayer begins with the Preface and continues through the Great Amen; the new translation will offer a more poetic wording.

The Preface begins with a dialogue between the priest and the people. This recognizes again the presence of Christ in the people, at this moment especially in the priest who will speak the prayer on behalf of the people. While spoken by the priest, it is a prayer of all the people, called to participate fully through attention and reverence. The call to lift hearts is a reminder that this point especially is a share in and foretaste of Heaven itself. Aware of God's presence with this community, at this point, we can only offer thanks. In the new translation of the Mass, the people will respond with a simple declarative statement: "It is right and just."

The body of the Preface changes but always focuses on God who seeks to bring us to salvation in Jesus Christ. The Preface closes with the Sanctus, the vision that Isaiah had of God on his Throne and the words that welcomed Jesus into Jerusalem on Palm Sunday: "Hosanna in the Highest!"

Several different possibilities for the body of the Eucharistic prayer follow; all contain the same elements. The first major element is the Epiclesis. Here, the priest asks the Father to send the Holy Spirit to sanctify the "gifts we bring" that will become the body and blood of Christ, both of the bread and wine on the altar and of the people in the pews. After the Epiclesis, the priest prays the Institution Narrative. At every Mass, these words are always the same. Using the gestures and words of Christ Himself, the priest recounts the Last Supper, the first Eucharist. It is Christ Himself, the great high priest, who speaks and re-presents (makes present again) his

own Sacrifice of the Cross. Jesus did with bread and wine at the Last Supper what he would physically on the Cross: offer to us his body and blood . The institution narrative closes with the command of Jesus: “Do this in memory of me.”

Following the institution narrative, the response of the church to this command is made explicit in the Memorial, or Anamnesis. Following the Anamnesis, is the Offering and Intercessions. In reality, this is another epiclesis where the priest calls on the Father to send the Holy Spirit in a particular way on the church: the community gathered for that Mass, the particular church symbolized by the naming of the Bishop, and of the whole church symbolized by the naming of the pope, along with the communion of saints and all those who have died.

The Father sends his Son to us in the Spirit through the church and we offer up our sacrifices through the church in the Spirit through Christ to the Father. The Eucharistic prayer closes with a great doxology which expresses the glorification of God by the community gathered. The people conclude and confirm the words spoken for them by pronouncing the Great Amen, “Yes I believe all that has been said.”

See the General instruction of the Roman Missal (Nos. 78-79) and Chapter 5 in Father Jeremy Driscoll’s book, “What Happens at Mass.”