

The New Missal Series, Part Six: ‘O Lord, I am not worthy’

In the Eucharistic Prayer, the bread and wine have been consecrated, transformed into the body and blood of Christ by the words of institution, spoken by Christ the Great High Priest through the mouth the priest celebrant. In light of love’s marvelous exchange, Christ is present, and we are able to be in communion with God and with one another in a singularly profound way. The Communion Rite is comprised of the Lord’s Prayer, the Rite of Peace, the Fraction, reception of the body and blood of Jesus, and the Prayer after Communion.

With Christ himself made present, we are able to realize in an intense way the Lord’s Prayer. United to Christ in sacrifice, we now join ourselves in the words he gave us. Through God’s gracious mercy and love, we are joined as sisters and brothers to Christ who directs his whole self to the Father. The title “Father” then, is not merely about who God is, but also about who we are in relationship to him.

And this is not merely those who are gathered for any particular Mass; it is far greater than that. It extends beyond earth to those gathered in heaven and beyond time to the future, when all is subjected to Christ, who will hand it over to the Father. The petitions in the Lord’s Prayer remind us of God’s power and providence, especially granting to us our “daily bread,” not only life’s necessities but the Eucharist, Bread of Life.

The Rite of Peace follows. We are called to make to one another a gesture of the peace that flows from Christ. We cannot be in communion with God if we are not trying to be in communion with our brothers and sisters (1 Jn 4:20). This is not a “free-for-all,” but a reminder to us and a ritualized attempt to offer to others the peace Christ promises his apostles: “Peace I leave you, my peace I give you.”

Following the Rite of Peace, the people acclaim Christ as the Lamb of God, an image from the ancient Israelites and a title for Christ from the book of Revelation. The priest fractions, or breaks, the large consecrated host which he holds up broken before the people in a visible sign of Christ’s body broken on the cross. In the new

translation, it will be clear that our participation is a share in the supper of the lamb, the eschatological banquet. All will respond with a phrase that more closely recalls the words of the centurion, a poignant reminder that no one is worthy to receive so great a gift except when made so by Christ.

Usually singing a song to unify hearts and voices, we come forward to receive the body and blood of Christ. We reflect on the humility and love God has for us: that he would become like a drink of wine, like a piece of bread, all to nourish us and draw us close. A scientist can explain the process by which food is digested and this remains an image for us of how God works to offer spiritual strength to our souls. This is so much more than earthly food. It is Christ himself, who has given himself up to feed not only our bodies but, even more importantly, our souls as well.

The Communion Rite closes with the Prayer After Communion. This prayer calls for the fruits of the Eucharist to be evident in the lives of all who have received.

See the General instruction of the Roman Missal (Nos. 80-89) and Chapter 6 in Father Jeremy Driscoll's book, "What Happens at Mass."