

LITURGY OF THE EUCHARIST

Introduction

There are four actions that take place during the Liturgy of the Eucharist.

- Taken: the bread and wine are placed on the Altar.
- Blessed: the Eucharistic Prayer is prayed.
- Broken: the consecrated Bread is broken.
- Given: Communion is distributed and received by the people of God.

The Last Supper and subsequent celebrations of the Eucharist took place within a Jewish context. The Jews, historically conscious of God's good deeds, had a special way of "remembering." Unfortunately, in English there is not a really 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. To keep this in mind will help us focus on the most precious gift we receive in the Eucharist, not just a symbol or memory, but the very Body and Blood of the Risen Christ.

The Structure of the Eucharistic Prayer

First, in a broader landscape, the Liturgy of the Eucharist begins with the gifts of bread and wine being brought to the altar. These gifts are "taken" as signs of the sacrificial offerings of the people and placed on the Altar by the priest. (Please refer to last week's bulletin insert on *Preparation Rites* for a fuller reflection).

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 principal celebrant, 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 in the new Missal, to be used in their variety according to the particular emphasis of a given celebration such as 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 the singing of the Sanctus (Holy, Holy, Holy Lord). The text weaves together praise for a totally transcendent and awe inspiring God of Heaven and thanks for the humble indwelling of God in the person of Jesus the Christ.

Third, in the midst of the principal celebrant offering the bread and wine to become Jesus' Body and Blood, we hear phrases that deepen awareness that we are also offering ourselves:

- *Graciously accept this oblation of our service (EP I).*
- *We your servants and your holy people, offer to your glorious majesty from the gifts you have given us...the holy Bread of eternal life and the Chalice of everlasting salvation (EP I).*
- *It is truly right and just, our duty and our salvation (EP II).*
- *Make holy, therefore, these gifts, we pray (EP II).*

- *We offer you in thanksgiving this holy and living sacrifice* (EP III).
- *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* (EP IV).

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.

As we call to mind and make present the life-giving events of our salvation, we also do more than remember the Last Supper. We make present the Sacrifice of Jesus Christ on the cross. Jesus is not crucified once again at the celebration of the Eucharist, but his sacrifice is made present for us. We offer our lives along with the Body and Blood of Christ to the Father in a sacrifice of praise and thanksgiving. In the offering of the whole Eucharistic Prayer we are also united with Christ's resurrection, the promise of our unending life in God when our pilgrimage on this earth is ended.

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. While those who have died see the Lord Jesus face to face, we receive the same Lord Jesus under the forms of bread and wine while we are on earth. There is an unbroken "family bond" in the Communion of Saints at each celebration of the Eucharist. Heaven and earth are united.

Finally, the Eucharistic Prayer is summed up in a great Doxology: "Through him, with him, in him..." which is summed up in a resounding "Amen" which should be sung with great conviction, for we pray what we believe. What is then "Broken" and "Given" will be covered in next week's bulletin insert on the Communion Rite.

Church Vocabulary

- **Canon of the Mass**: The central part of the Mass, also known as the Eucharistic Prayer or anaphora, which is the prayer of thanksgiving and consecration. It begins with the Preface Dialogue (i.e., "The Lord be with you. . . Lift up your hearts. . . Let us give thanks to the Lord our God") and concludes with a final Doxology ("Through him, and with him, and in him") and "Amen."
- **Epiclesis**: The prayer petitioning the Father to send the Holy Spirit to sanctify offerings of bread and wine so that they may become the Body and Blood of Christ.
- **Institution Narrative/Consecration**: That part of the Eucharistic Prayer during which the priest prays the Lord's words of institution of the Eucharist at the Last Supper. Through this prayer the bread and wine become the risen Body and Blood of Jesus.
- **Anamnesis**: From the Greek, meaning "remembrance." We remember Jesus' historical saving deeds in the liturgical action of the Church which inspires thanksgiving and praise. Every Eucharistic Prayer contains an anamnesis or memorial in which the Church calls to mind the Passion, Resurrection, and glorious return of Christ Jesus.
- **Doxology**: A Christian prayer that gives praise and glory to God often, in a special way, to the three divine Persons of the Trinity. Liturgical prayers, including the Eucharistic Prayer, traditionally conclude with the Doxology "to the Father, through the Son, in the Holy Spirit."