

Why Liturgy Matters? Part 3

Eucharistic Prayer

The Eucharistic prayer has its roots in the Jewish cultic life, especially in a type of prayer known as the *berakah*. Often used by the Jewish people on both public and private occasions, prayers of this kind were said by Jesus at the Last Supper, *i.e.* a short formula over the bread and a longer formula over the wine as was customary in Jewish meal practice (Johnson 88).

Thanks and petition: The Eucharistic prayer is primarily a prayer of thanksgiving, but during it we ask God for his help.

Thanksgiving. The word "**Eucharist**" means, "giving thanks." We praise our Father for his great glory, for he is our holy God. We thank him and praise him in the name of all creatures for his wonderful works of creation. We give him special thanks for his greatest gift, Jesus Christ his Son. Through Jesus he has shown us mercy and has saved us. Now we give him thanks for his love.

Intercession. The Church is called to be a people of prayer. As sharers in the priesthood of Christ, we have the unending privilege of standing before God and praying in union with Christ for all. We ask for his help for ourselves, for the Church, for its living members, for the dead, and for salvation and peace for the entire human race. We ask our Father to bring all to salvation in Jesus Christ (CCCB).

A presidential prayer: The Eucharistic prayer is proclaimed by the bishop or priest as presider of the assembly of believers. He alone says the prayer, in the name of the community (CCCB).

Kneeling/ Standing. For centuries standing was the church's customary position for common prayer. It was a sign of joy, especially of having been joined through baptism to the risen Christ. In fact, several early church councils forbade kneeling on Sundays during the Eucharist. Although evidence is meager, it seems that it was only during the early Middle Ages, a time when emphasis was placed on venerating the Eucharist that people began to kneel (after the Sanctus till after the final Amen) during the Eucharistic prayer. Nonetheless, a number of communities have reintroduced the church's earlier practice of standing throughout this prayer (Johnson 98); this practice (**STANDING throughout the Eucharistic Prayer**) is observed in many parishes.

Although the Eucharistic prayer is essentially a unified formula, several structural elements can be identified as forming this whole:

Thanksgiving (Preface)

When he proclaims the Preface of the Eucharistic prayer, the priest speaks in the name of the people and expresses thanks to God for salvation and love (GIRM 55).

Acclamation (*Sanctus*: Holy, Holy, Holy Lord)

Joining with the angels, the congregation sings or recites the *Sanctus*. This acclamation is an intrinsic part of the eucharistic prayer and all the people join with the priest in singing or reciting it.

Epiclesis (Invocation of the Holy Spirit)

With hands outstretched over the gifts (bread and wine) and later on making the sign of the cross over the gifts, the priest, on behalf of the Church, calls on God's power and asks that the gifts offered by human hands be transformed and consecrated to become Christ's body and blood. In like manner the priest also asks God that the worshipping community becomes Christ's body in our world.

Narrative of the Institution and Consecration

In the words and actions of Christ, that sacrifice is celebrated which he himself instituted at the Last Supper, when under the appearances of bread and wine, he offered his body and blood, gave them to his apostles to eat and drink, and then commanded that they carry on this mystery (GIRM 55d). After the priest individually elevates the consecrated bread and the consecrated wine, he genuflects in adoration. With the priest making his genuflection (act of reverencing God by which the right knee is bent to briefly touch the floor), the people are invited to show reverence to the consecrated bread and wine by making a profound bow.

Memorial Acclamation

Immediately after the institution narrative the priest, or as is certainly appropriate, the deacon, invites the people to give forth an acclamation 'proclaiming the mystery of Christ's death, resurrection and glorification. It is the total mystery of Christ present and active among his people and still awaited by them (Johnson 107).

Anamnesis ("Memorial" of the Passion and of the whole mystery of Christ)

This section recalls that the redeeming actions of Christ are actually made present here and now. The Eucharist is not merely a subjective remembrance of a past event, but an actual, living, and efficacious celebration which contains, as it were, the whole saving action of Christ (Johnson 109).

Request that the offering be received

In this memorial, the Church – and in particular the Church here and now assembled- offers the spotless victim to the Father in the Holy Spirit. The Church's intention is that the faithful not only offer this victim but also learn to offer themselves and so to surrender themselves, through Christ, the Mediator, to an ever more complete union with the Father and with each other, so that at last God may be all in all (GIRM 55f).

Intercessions and Commemorations

The intercessions make it clear that the Eucharist is celebrated in the communion with the entire Church of heaven and earth and that the offering is made for the Church and all its members, living and dead, who are called to share in the salvation and redemption purchased by Christ's body and blood (GIRM 55g).

Concluding Doxology

Final Doxology: the praise of God is expressed in the doxology, to which the people's acclamation (Great Amen) is an assent and a conclusion. The priest holds on high the consecrated bread and wine, a gesture of offering accompanying the words of doxology (Through him...with him...in him...).

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