

### #18 THE GREAT PRAYER OF THANKSGIVING: EUCHARISTIC PRAYING

Every time we gather to celebrate the Eucharist, we lift our hearts in song and prayer to give praise and thanks to God for his infinite love and mercy. At the core of our celebration is the great prayer of thanksgiving: the Eucharistic Prayer. Many of us can probably recite parts of this prayer from memory.

Sometimes we hear this prayer prayed with great solemnity, and sometimes listen to a presider's hurried tone. What is so important about this prayer? In the next several articles, I am going to break-open parts of the Eucharistic Prayer and highlight some of the coming changes to its language.

The Eucharistic Prayer is a rather lengthy prayer that begins with an opening dialogue ("The Lord be with you . . ." and ends with the Great Amen. It is a particular literary genre unique to liturgical celebrations.

Many of us use the word "Eucharist" as a synonym for Mass or Holy Communion, but the word itself points to a deeper reality. Eucharist comes from the Greek word *eucharistein*, which means, "to give thanks". The prayer of thanksgiving is at the heart of our liturgical life, giving voice to the Church's gratitude for God's gift of salvation through Christ in the power of the Holy Spirit.

The entire prayer is the prayer of Christ to the Father. Since the Church is the sacrament of Christ in the world, we, the Body of Christ, are united with Christ, who offers prayer to the Father through the presider's action.

One major misconception is that the priest alone prays the Eucharistic Prayer, but that is not true. The presider invites the assembly to join their hearts and minds to the prayer during the opening dialogue. The *General Instruction of the Roman Missal* says,

[T]he meaning of the Prayer is that the entire congregation . . . should join itself with Christ in confessing the great deeds of God . . . The Eucharistic Prayer demands that all listen to it with reverence and in silence (78).



The earliest forms of this prayer were extemporaneous, but ordered. The presider had to be so skilled and familiar with the structure of the prayer, that he could offer the thanksgiving over the bread and the wine with elegance and ease. By the third century, prayers began to be memorized and then written down and shared. Our current Missal has ten different Eucharistic Prayers, but most of us hear two or three most often.

Richard McCarron, in *The Eucharistic Prayer at Sunday Mass* says, "Praying the eucharistic prayer well transforms our lives and molds our vision in such a way that we witness God's action here and now and taste and see how good God is in our communion" (6). How have you or your parish been transformed in its prayer of thanksgiving?

Next time we will begin looking at the structure in more depth.