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Doing Rite!™

The Institute for Christian Formation, Inc.

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Eucharistic Prayer

Giving Thanks

In the United States, each year on the fourth Thursday in November we celebrate Thanksgiving Day. But what if instead of celebrating Thanksgiving once each year we celebrated it every week, or maybe every day? As Catholic Christians we do just that! We celebrate Thanksgiving every Sunday and Holy Day, and some of us celebrate Thanksgiving every day. Because every time we celebrate Mass, we are celebrating thanksgiving. The word "eucharist" comes from the Greek, and literally means "to give thanks"!

Imagine how different our experience of prayer might be if we put as much energy, preparation and detail into our celebration of the Mass as we do into planning and celebrating a holiday such as Thanksgiving. And yet that is exactly what we are called to do - to enter fully, actively and consciously into the prayer of the Church.

It is so easy in our "I want what I want and I want it now" culture to overlook gratitude and thanksgiving. Have you ever given someone a gift, only to have the person either ignore the gift outright, or else take the gift without any word of thanks to you? If so, I am sure you were hurt and felt slighted. And yet all we have, including our very lives, is a gift from God. When is the last time you stopped and really acknowledged your giftedness, and thanked God for all God has given you. Do you do this weekly, or daily, or often during the day?

Make thanksgiving and gratitude a part of daily life. Make a point of thanking God for all your gifts - not just on Thanksgiving Day, but each and every day of your life. And be especially thankful for the Eucharist - our great prayer of thanksgiving!



The Eucharistic Prayer

- * The word Eucharist means "giving thanks."
- * The Eucharistic Prayer is our most important prayer as Catholic Christians.
- * The Eucharistic Prayer begins with the Preface Dialogue and concludes with our great "Amen."



This issue of *Doing Rite!*™ is focused on the Eucharistic Prayer. You are probably aware that there is more than one Eucharistic Prayer which may be prayed at Mass.

The Roman Canon

There are Eucharistic Prayers I, II, III, and IV, as well as Eucharistic Prayers for Reconciliation, for Various Needs and Occasions, and for Masses with Children. For centuries in our Roman Rite, there was only one Eucharistic Prayer, the Roman Canon (Eucharistic Prayer I). The word "canon" comes from the Greek "kanon" which literally refers to a measuring stick,

but we use it to mean a rule or guide. Our other current Eucharistic Prayers came out of the reforms of Vatican Council II.

In this newsletter, we will focus on Eucharistic Prayer I, the Roman Canon. But to gain a fuller appreciation of this prayer, I would suggest you spend some time reflecting on the words of each of our Eucharistic Prayers.

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The Eucharistic Prayer

The Liturgy of the Eucharist is the second of the two main parts of our Mass. It begins with the Preparation of the Altar and the Gifts. The Eucharistic Prayer itself begins with the Preface Dialogue, or when the presider says “the Lord be with you” and after our response invites us to “lift up our hearts.” And the Eucharistic Prayer continues all the way through our “Amen” in response to

the Doxology. This “Amen” response comes right before we pray the Lord’s Prayer.

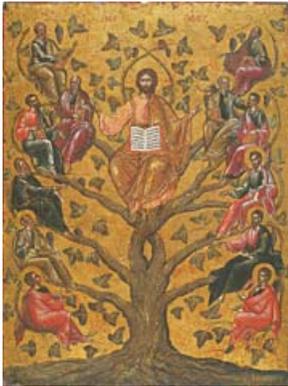
The Eucharistic Prayer is at the heart of our celebration of Mass, and is our most important prayer as Catholic Christians. In the Eucharistic Prayer we offer thanksgiving to God, we praise God, the Holy Spirit is invoked, we hear the Institution Narrative, we remember God’s faithfulness, we offer our sacrifice, we offer

prayers of intercession, and conclude by responding “amen” to the doxology.

The Eucharistic Prayer is a presidential prayer, meaning that the presider proclaims this prayer in the name of the community of believers. But we actively participate by our attentive listening and watching, by our spoken and sung responses, and by joining our prayers and praise and offering to those of the whole Church.



All Together



Christ the True Vine
Cretan, 16th Century
Byzantine Museum of Athens

We are all in this together, as the very word communion denotes. Listen attentively to the words of the Eucharistic Prayer - the words proclaimed by the presider, and our responses. This prayer is not an “I” or “me” prayer - it is not individual but communal. In Eucharistic Prayer I, or the Roman Canon, the words “we”, “us”, and “our” or “ourselves” are spoken in

prayer no less than 36 times! And this doesn’t even begin to take into account words such as “all” or “all of you.”

Yes, we are in this together - we are part of the communion of saints - the entire Church, both those still living and those who have died. In our Eucharistic Prayer there is the commemoration of the living as well as of the dead. At both of these points in Eucharistic Prayer I there

is a pause while we have time to recall in our minds those we especially remember in this liturgy.

A concrete way to realize the truly communal nature of our Eucharist is to sit down with the words of Eucharistic Prayer I and slowly and carefully read the prayer making note of all of the plural pronouns. Then keep this consciously in mind the next time you are at liturgy.

Jesus’ Own Words

In the Eucharistic Prayer there is what we call the “Institution Narrative.” This is when we hear the account of the Last Supper. The presider uses Jesus’ own words in recounting Jesus’ command that we eat his body and drink his blood. Our offering of bread and wine is transformed into the Body and Blood of Christ. Jesus commands us to eat and drink in memory of him.

Eucharist is a verb - it is an action. Listen closely to the institution narrative. Jesus **took** the bread, gave his Father thanks and praise (**blessed** the bread), **broke** the bread, and **gave** the bread to his disciples.

Take, bless, break and give - all actions, all verbs. The Eucharist is not something passive which we simply receive. Rather, it is an action into which we fully and consciously enter.

How is your life and prayer a witness to this? We who are privileged to celebrate the Eucharist every Sunday, perhaps even every day, must take caution that this action that is the central prayer of our Church does not become simply rote. Perhaps we might make a resolution that we celebrate the Eucharist with renewed vigor and fully, consciously, and actively enter into the prayer of the Church as we do what Jesus commanded.



Mystical Supper
Early 14th Century
School: Panselinos
Vatopedi Monastery,
Mt. Athos

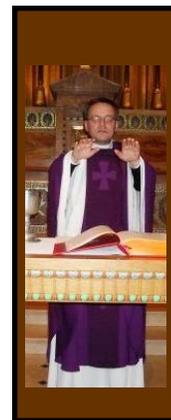
Epiclesis and Anamnesis

Prior to the Institution Narrative is the “Epiclesis” or the invocation of the Holy Spirit. The Church asks the Father to send the Holy Spirit on our offering of bread and wine so that by his power they might become the Body and Blood of Jesus Christ. The presider has his hands outstretched over our gifts of bread and wine as the Spirit is invoked.

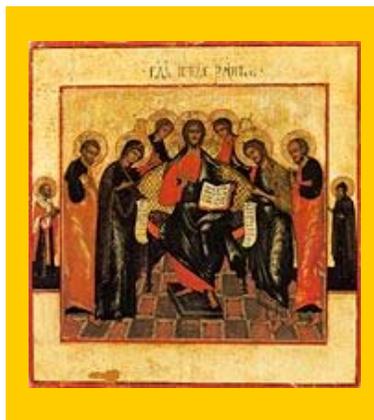
Following the Institution Narrative there is the Anamnesis. This word means to remember. (Recall that when someone has *amnesia* they have lost their memory.) At the Anamnesis we remember the Paschal Mystery of Jesus Christ: Jesus’ passion, death, resurrection and ascension into Spirit-filled glory. We remember all the wonderful gifts God has given us and all God has done for us. Because God has been so faithful to us in the past, we trust that God will continue to bless us.

Because there are different “movements”, if you will, in the Eucharistic Prayer, sometimes we think of it as a series of different prayers. But this is not the case. The entire Eucharistic Prayer, from the Preface Dialogue through our concluding “Amen” is all one cohesive, beautiful prayer of thanksgiving. This is true no matter which Eucharistic Prayer we are praying.

Ask the Holy Spirit to enlighten you and open you to full appreciation of this great prayer of thanksgiving.



Intercession



Deisis (Novgorod)
Early 18th Century
Heritage: Russian

When we pray on behalf of others, this is called intercessory prayer. While the Eucharistic Prayer is most especially a prayer of thanksgiving, in this great prayer we also ask God to help others. We can offer this intercession because by virtue of our baptism we share in Christ’s priestly ministry.

Take some time to slowly reflect on our prayer of intercession in Eucharistic Prayer I.

We are praying for the entire Church and the Church’s leaders. We pray for ourselves, for the living and the dead, and for all humanity. We pray for forgiveness.

It is good to remember that in the Eucha-

ristic Prayer, our intercession is intricately mingled with our praise and thanksgiving. This is a valuable lesson to carry over into our prayer life outside of our celebration of the Eucharist. When we pray our daily prayers asking for God’s intercession, are we doing so in a context of thanks and praise?

And do we regularly, in our daily prayer, intercede for the Church, the living and the dead, and the entire world?

It is good to take time and remind ourselves that we are a priestly people - we are the Priesthood of the Baptized. And intercessory prayer is not an option - it is our priestly duty!

Through Christ Our Lord

Have you ever served as a mediator between two people or two groups of people? The word “mediator” comes from the Latin, and literally means “one who goes between.” Jesus Christ is our greatest mediator. Jesus’ life, death and resurrection is the link between us in our fallen nature and God the Father. Recall that the gates of Paradise, closed by Adam’s sin, were opened by Jesus

Christ’s death and resurrection. Christ trampled death so that we might be restored to full stature.

Christ’s role as our mediator is very prominent in the Eucharistic Prayer. The opening paragraph of Eucharistic Prayer I states that we come to the Father through Jesus Christ. It is through Jesus that we ask God to accept and bless our offering. Several times in

this prayer the presider might finish a paragraph by praying, “through Christ our Lord.” Towards the end of this prayer, the presider asks that God (the Father) grant us forgiveness through Christ. And the prayer concludes, “Through him (Jesus), with him, in him...”, to which we respond “Amen.”

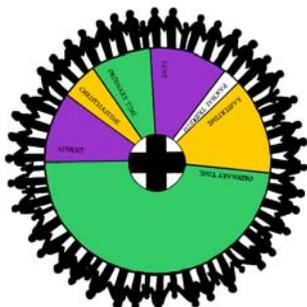
At the Last Supper Jesus said that whatever was asked in his name he would do. So we dare to pray in Jesus’ name. Amen.



Christ Enthroned
Mid 17th Century
Emmanuel Tzanes
Byzantine Museum,
Athens, Greece

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Doing Rite![™] is a mark of The Institute for Christian Formation, Inc. These resources are created as a tool for reflection to aid liturgical formation. They focus on ritual and gesture we use in our prayer and liturgy, and on the liturgical rites of the Roman Catholic Church.

The Institute for Christian Formation, Inc. (ICF) is a non-profit corporation that assists the faithful – families, catechists, parishes, schools, etc. – with holistic faith formation centered on Jesus Christ revealing himself to us in Word (Scripture), Sacrament, and the Liturgical Calendar. Founded in 2004, the ICF strives to assist Catholic Christians in celebrating and handing on faith in a manner authentic to our Roman Catholic tradition.

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Heaven on Earth

You have probably heard the term, “*the heavenly banquet table.*” But when you come forward in the communion procession at Mass to receive the Eucharist, are you consciously aware of what it is you are doing? Are you aware from what “table” or “altar” you are receiving this Eucharist?

The next time you are at Mass and Eucharistic Prayer I is prayed, listen very intently to the words spoken by the presider. After we have proclaimed the “mystery of faith” or the “Memorial Acclamation”, the presider continues praying. At one point the presider prays that God’s angel will take this sacrifice to God’s altar - in heaven! The presider then says that we receive from “this altar...” We are receiving the Eucharist from God’s altar in heaven!

If we really enter into the liturgy and take this seriously it is very difficult to be complacent. We are literally experiencing heaven on earth! In the liturgy we are experiencing eternity. It is all happening here and now, yet it happened once and for all. That is why we say, for example, that Christ is born **today**, or Christ is risen **today**.

My pastor has a practice that I have come to very much appreciate, and have taken to doing myself. He always removes his wristwatch before liturgy. I now remove my own watch before entering into the prayer of the Church. It is a very conscious reminder to me that this time of prayer is outside the bounds of human time, as I know it. When I pray with the Church I have entered eternal time.

Try this yourself. You will be amazed at how such a small gesture can serve as such an important reminder of what it is we do when we pray with the Church. And you will be surprised at the “teachable moment” this provides, as your children, students, and friends ask why you are taking off your watch. Let them know - it is because we are about to experience heaven on earth!



Divine Liturgy, Angel Carrying Chalice
Mid 16th Century
Theophanes the Cretan
Stavronikita Monastery, Mount Athos