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The Eucharistic Prayer
National Bulletin on Liturgy
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Editorial commentary in the Bulletin is the responsibility of the editor.

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The eucharistic prayer is the central prayer of our eucharistic liturgy. It is the prayer of the entire liturgical assembly, and not just of the priest. What is a eucharistic prayer in form and content? How can the participation of lay people in the eucharistic prayer be facilitated? What is the message of the church’s official eucharistic prayers?
# Table of Contents

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Introduction</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Selected Reading</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Form and Structure</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Good Celebration</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Content and Meaning</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Church's Creed</td>
<td>William Marrevee 28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Eucharist as Sacrifice</td>
<td>William Marrevee 32</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Texts and Commentaries</td>
<td>40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Action of the Eucharist</td>
<td>55</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Posture during the Eucharistic Prayer</td>
<td>59</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other Notes</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Summer School</td>
<td>61</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Brief Book Notices</td>
<td>62</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Center and summit: The General Instruction of the Roman Missal tells us that the eucharistic prayer is “the center and summit of the entire [eucharistic] celebration” (n. 54). If that is true – and if we want it to be true in our own experience – then we need continually to try to enter into the eucharistic prayer more deeply, understand it better, celebrate it with greater devotion, participate in it more fully, and allow it to be more fruitful in our daily lives.

New eucharistic prayers: It was precisely a desire to enrich the experience of the eucharistic prayer for everyone that a number of new eucharistic prayers were composed and introduced into the liturgical life of the church in our own time. Official documents state that in introducing the new eucharistic prayers:

The Church shows her concern for a celebration which is more alive and which fosters better participation, as well as her concern for an ever deepening appreciation of the eucharistic mystery, by presenting a wealth and variety of themes and aspects for catechesis.¹

[The] spiritual and pastoral purpose [or introducing new eucharistic prayers] is clear:

to open more lavishly to priests and faithful, in the way they celebrate Mass, the biblical treasures of the Christian life and those traditional in the universal Church and to assist in their being understood and vitally assimilated.

In their celebrations priests and people will thus be able to achieve the ideal of full, active, inward, and outward participation that the Council has set as the aim of the reform of the liturgy.²

[New eucharistic prayers have been introduced] in the interest of making possible in the central part of the eucharistic celebration a better proclamation of God’s blessings and better recollection of the history of salvation.

One [eucharistic prayer] alone cannot contain all the pastoral, spiritual, and theological richness to be hoped for. A multiplicity of texts must make up for the limitation of any one of them.³

The experience of lay people: At the present time, however, it seems that the eucharistic prayer is not experienced as “center and summit” of the eucharistic liturgy, at least by many lay people. It is true that “the consecration”

² Guidelines Au cours des derniers mois, to assist catechesis on the anaphoras of the Mass, 2 June 1968. DOL: 244: 1945
³ Ibid., DOL 244: 1954
is felt to be of great importance, but both it and the rest of the eucharistic prayer tend to be viewed as a prayer of the priest. In addition, the significance of the remainder of this prayer is not appreciated as much as it is supposed to be.

Theory versus practice: What is the basis for this discrepancy between theory and practice? In fact, many possible reasons can be proposed. These include the distance between the altar and the people and the elevation of the altar; weak eucharistic symbols; the posture adopted by the people; not much variety in texts; poor proclamation by the presider; not singing the acclamations; too few acclamations; poor listening skills.

The people experience less participation in the eucharistic prayer – both verbally and nonverbally – than does the priest presider; the meaning of the eucharistic prayer is rarely taught and it is seldom preached upon; the concept of “doing” eucharist is not widely appreciated; it is not evident that the eucharistic prayer is a table prayer; thanksgiving is not central to their religious life, etc.

This issue of the Bulletin is intended to help people and priests celebrate the eucharistic prayer better. It addresses questions such as, What is a eucharistic prayer in terms of form and structure? How can we celebrate it well? In addition, the meaning of the eucharistic prayer will be considered from several points of view: as context and action, as a prayer of thanksgiving and praise, as a trinitarian prayer, as a prayer of the church, as a prayer of the eucharist, and as a creed or profession of faith. The eucharist as sacrifice will also be considered. Finally, the text of six of our eucharistic prayers will be presented together with a brief commentary. The eucharistic prayers for masses with children will not be considered here for lack of space.

Selected Reading


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Fritz Chenderlin, "Do This As My Memorial" (Rome: Biblical Institute Press 1982)

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Thomas J. Talley, "The eucharistic prayer of the ancient church according to recent research: results and reflections," *Studia Liturgica* 11 (1976) 138-158


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Form and Structure

What is a eucharistic prayer? What does it look like? What form and structure does it have? How can we recognize a eucharistic prayer when we see its text or hear it proclaimed?

The General Instruction of the Roman Missal provides a list of “the chief elements making up the eucharistic prayer;” eight such elements are given. To help understand the form and structure of a modern eucharistic prayer of the Roman Catholic Church, these eight sections of the General Instruction will be quoted, and the corresponding section of eucharistic prayer 2 will be given. Because this list is a generalization and needs to be qualified or further explained at points, additional comments will be provided when necessary. In addition, appropriate sections of eucharistic prayers 3 or 4 will be given when eucharistic prayer 2 does not adequately illustrate a point.

Thanksgiving (expressed especially in the preface):

in the name of the entire people of God, the priest praises the Father and gives thanks to him for the whole work of salvation or for some special aspects of it that corresponds to the day, feast, or season. (GIRM 55a)

Preface: The first part of a eucharistic prayer is the preface. This may be printed with the rest of the eucharistic prayer or separately. Eucharistic prayers 1, 2 and 3 may be used with almost any preface. However, eucharistic prayer 4 and the eucharistic prayers for masses of reconciliation and for masses with children each have their own preface, which is not to be replaced by another.

Dialogue: The preface has a four-part structure. The first is called the preface dialogue. Such a dialogue precedes the Jewish blessing after meals. It is both an invitation to join in the prayer, and a giving of permission to the presider to speak the prayer in the name of all.

The Lord be with you.
And also with you.

Lift up your hearts.
We lift them up to the Lord

Let us give thanks to the Lord our God.
It is right to give him thanks and praise.¹

Introduction: The preface itself begins with an introductory phrase. Two of these are used frequently:

¹ The latest revision of this text, by the English Language Liturgical Consultation (an international and ecumenical body), proposes “It is right to give our thanks and praise.” See Praying Together (Nashville: Abingdon Press 1990) 33
Father, it is our duty and our salvation, always and everywhere to give you thanks.

and

Father, it is our duty and our salvation, always and everywhere to give you thanks through your beloved Son, Jesus Christ.

The body of the preface describes the motive for thanksgiving in greater detail; each of the more than 80 prefaces is unique in this respect. The body of the preface for eucharistic prayer 2 is as follows:

He is the Word through whom you made the universe, the Savior you sent to redeem us. By the power of the Holy Spirit he took flesh and was born of the Virgin Mary.

For our sake he opened his arms on the cross; he put an end to death and revealed the resurrection. In this he fulfilled your will and won for you a holy people.

Conclusion: The preface closes with a concluding phrase which is at the same time a transition that leads to the Holy, holy. There are about twenty such concluding phrases in use. The one used in the preface of eucharistic prayer 2 is as follows:

And so we join the angels and the saints in proclaiming your glory as we sing (say):

Acclamation: 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. (GIRM 55b)

The Holy, holy is inspired by Isaiah 6: 3 and Mark 11: 9-10, and needs little comment. Note, however, that the third “holy” goes with “Lord,” and that “Lord” is separated by a comma from “God of power and might.” It is sometimes spoken as if the punctuation were, “Holy, holy, holy, Lord God of power and might,” but this is not correct.

Holy, holy, holy Lord, God of power and might, heaven and earth are full of your glory.
Hosanna in the highest.
Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord.
Hosanna in the highest.

Vere sanctus: The section that immediately follows the Holy, holy does not have a distinctive name. The first sentence is sometimes known by the Latin words vere sanctus (truly holy), because it connects the Holy, holy with what follows by making reference to the holiness of God. Thus, in eucharistic prayer 2:
Lord, you are holy indeed,  
the fountain of all holiness.

**Post-sanctus:** The term post-sanctus (after the *Holy, holy*) is sometimes used for everything that follows the *Holy, holy* and precedes the institution narrative. This section always includes the first epiclesis in Roman Catholic eucharistic prayers, and usually contains the element of praise. In most Eastern, Anglican and Protestant eucharistic prayers this section will not contain any epiclesis. This term can be more confusing than helpful, therefore.

**In eucharistic prayer 2** the first epiclesis immediately follows the *vere sanctus* sentence. More often, however, the theme of praise is continued from the thanksgiving, as shown in eucharistic prayer 3.

Father, you are holy indeed,  
and all creation rightly gives you praise.  
All life, all holiness come from you  
through your Son, Jesus Christ our Lord,  
by the working of the Holy Spirit.  
From age to age you gather a people to yourself,  
so that from east to west  
a perfect offering may be made  
to the glory of your name.

**Epiclesis:**  
in special invocations the Church calls on God's power and asks that the gifts offered by human hands be consecrated, that is, become Christ's body and blood, and that the victim to be received in communion be the source of salvation for those who will partake. (GIRM 55c)

**Two parts:** In modern Roman Catholic eucharistic prayers, the epiclesis is divided into two parts. The first or so-called "consecratory" epiclesis comes just before the institution narrative and just after either the *vere sanctus* or the second part of the thanksgiving. The second or so-called "communion" epiclesis follows the part of the eucharistic prayer called the offering (see below).

**In eucharistic prayer 2** the first epiclesis is the following:

Let your Spirit come upon these gifts  
to make them holy,  
so that they may become for us  
the body and blood of our Lord, Jesus Christ.

**Institution narrative 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, then commanded that they carry on this mystery. (GIRM 55d)

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2 This Greek word, which basically means "invocation," is usually pronounced e-pi-CLEE-sis by speakers of English. Speakers of Greek, however, would pronounce it e-PEE-clay-sis.
**Subdivisions:** This part of the eucharistic prayer may be further subdivided for the sake of study.

**Introduction:** First, there is an introduction, which may also provide a transition between the first epiclesis and the institution. In eucharistic prayer 2 this is:

Before he was given up to death,  
a death he freely accepted,

**Description:** Next, a description of what Jesus did at the Last Supper with respect to the bread is given. This varies somewhat from one eucharistic prayer to another.

he took bread and gave you thanks.  
He broke the bread,  
gave it to his disciples, and said:

**Command and interpretation:** After this comes Jesus’ command to eat the bread, accompanied by the words with which Jesus interpreted the meaning of this action. This text is the same in each eucharistic prayer.

Take this, all of you, and eat it:  
this is my body which will be given up for you.

**Description:** Next, a description of what Jesus did at the Last Supper with respect to the wine is given. This text varies slightly from one eucharistic prayer to another.

When supper was ended, he took the cup.  
Again he gave you thanks and praise,  
gave the cup to his disciples, and said:

**Command and interpretation:** Jesus’ command to drink of the cup, together with the accompanying words of interpretation follow. This text is the same in each eucharistic prayer.

Take this, all of you, and drink from it:  
this is the cup of my blood,  
the blood of the new and everlasting covenant.  
it will be shed for you and for all  
so that sins may be forgiven.

**Command:** The institution narrative continues with Jesus’ command to repeat his actions.

Do this in memory of me.

**Memorial acclamation:** The institution narrative concludes with the memorial acclamation. This begins with an invitation issued by the presider; the acclamation itself follows. There are four alternative memorial acclamations; in Canada a different invitation may be used for each. Here the first text is given.

**Invitation:**

Let us proclaim the mystery of faith:
Acclamation:

Christ has died,
Christ is risen,
Christ will come again.

Anamnesis:

_in fulfillment of the command received from Christ through the apostles, the Church keeps his memorial by recalling especially his passion, resurrection, and ascension._ (GIRM 55e)³

This element varies in length and in the events of the paschal mystery that it enumerates. The anamnesis of eucharistic prayer 2 is the shortest:

In memory of his death and resurrection

while that of eucharistic prayer 3 is more extensive:

Father, calling to mind
the death your Son endured for our salvation,
his glorious resurrection and ascension into heaven,
and ready to greet him when he comes again.

Offering:

_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)

Follows the anamnesis: The offering immediately follows the anamnesis and is often connected with it grammatically. Thus in eucharistic prayer 2 both are contained in a single short sentence

we offer you, Father, this life-giving bread,
this saving cup.

Acceptance: The offering itself is sometimes followed by a sentence or phrase that adds to the element of offering or asks that God accept it. Thus in eucharistic prayer 4 we pray:

Lord, look upon this sacrifice
which you have given to your Church

Epiclesis: The second or “communion” epiclesis comes next. In eucharistic prayer 2 this is:

May all of us who share in the body and blood of Christ
be brought together in unity by the Holy Spirit.

Comparing the two sections of the epiclesis in the eucharistic prayer, we see that the first asks God to change the bread and wine into the body and blood

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³This Greek word, which basically means "remembrance" or "memorial," is usually pronounced an-am-NEE-sis by speakers of English. Speakers of Greek would pronounce it a-NAM-ne-sis.
of Christ. The second, equally important, but often overlooked, asks God to change us into the one body of Christ.

Intercessions:
the intercessions make it clear that the eucharist is celebrated in 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)

Complex structure: This element varies in length and construction from one eucharistic prayer to another. It consists of several sub-elements: intercessions for the church, for ourselves, for the dead, and for the world (only in some eucharistic prayers). The intercessions either lead to or (in some cases) are preceded by a commemoration of the saints. In eucharistic prayer 2 the intercessions are as follows:

Intercession for the church:

    Lord, remember your Church throughout the world;
    make us grow in love,
    together with N. our Pope,
    N. our bishop, and all the clergy.

Intercession for the dead:

    Remember our brothers and sisters
    who have gone to their rest
    in the hope of rising again;
    bring them and all the departed
    into the light of your presence.

Some eucharistic prayers have a special intercession or insert for the dead for use in Masses for the dead.

Intercession for ourselves and all members of the church. This is brief in eucharistic prayer 2,

    Have mercy on us all;

but longer in eucharistic prayer 3:

    Father, hear the prayers of the family
    you have gathered here before you.
    In mercy and love
    unite all your children wherever they may be.

Intercession for the world: This occurs only in some prayers, such as eucharistic prayer 3:

    Lord, may this sacrifice,
    which has made our peace with you,
    advance the peace and salvation of all the world.

Commemoration of the saints: This is closely linked with the intercessions:

    make us worthy to share eternal life
    with Mary, the virgin Mother of God,
with the apostles, and with all the saints
who have done your will throughout the ages.

Vision and hope: The commemoration of the saints concludes with an eschatological vision, in which we express our hope that one day we will worship with the saints in the very presence of God. The intercessions as a whole conclude with a reference with Christ; this also provides a transition to the doxology that follows.

May we praise you in union with them,
and give you glory
through your Son, Jesus Christ.

This is stated even more clearly in eucharistic prayer 3:

We hope to enjoy for ever the vision of your glory
through Christ our Lord,
from whom all good things come.

Final doxology:
the praise of God is expressed in the doxology, to which the people’s acclamation is an assent and a conclusion. (GIRM 55h)

Never varies: This text is constant in all eucharistic prayers for the sake of smooth proclamation by the presider. The pronoun “him” of course refers to Jesus Christ, who has just been mentioned.

Through him,
with him,
in him,
in the unity of the Holy Spirit,
all glory and honor is yours,
almighty Father,
for ever and ever.
Amen.

The doxology concludes with the congregational acclamation known as the Great Amen.

Variation in Form and Structure

Guidelines, not rules: The list of elements of a eucharistic prayer given in the General Instruction of the Roman Missal does not constitute an absolute rule that must always be followed. It does not apply, for example, to the Roman Canon (eucharistic prayer 1). Considerable variations occur as well in the eucharistic prayers for masses with children. Eucharistic prayers of other parts of the Catholic Church, for example, the Ukrainian Catholic Church, use eucharistic prayers with somewhat different structures.

The description of the eucharistic prayer given in the General Instruction does not even describe eucharistic prayers 2, 3 and 4 with complete accuracy. It does not clearly indicate that praise often follows the Holy, holy nor does it clearly show that the epiclesis is divided and where the second part is to be found. It is a general description, and considerable variation is permissible without deviation from orthodox doctrine.
The epiclesis: Ecumenically – and even within the different rites of the Catholic Church – the most contentious issue concerns the division of the epiclesis. The eucharistic prayers of most churches and rites contain only a single epiclesis, which has both “consecratory” and “communion” aspects; it is placed where the second epiclesis is found in modern Roman Catholic texts. This division has historical roots, but is not a matter of doctrine.

The Unity of the Eucharistic Prayer

The analysis and subdivision of the eucharistic prayer given above helps us to understand its form and shape, and would help as well if we were to practice composing such a text. However, it cannot be emphasized too strongly that the eucharistic prayer is a single prayer; it has an intrinsic unity; it is not a series of several prayers that follow each other one by one.

SUPPLEMENT TO THE SACRAMENTARY


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For Study and Comment.
May be inserted into present Sacramentary
To improve our celebration: At the present time many persons do not experience the eucharistic prayer as the centre and high point of their celebration, either individually or communally. Every effort needs to be made, therefore, to improve our celebration of the eucharistic prayer – as well as our understanding of it – so that the high priority given it by the church can be more satisfactorily experienced. The following are a few concrete suggestions along these lines.

Attitudes

The prayer of all: Priest presiders need to accept fully – in their hearts as well as minds – that the eucharistic prayer is the prayer of the whole local church, the laity as well as themselves. Enabling the full participation of everyone in the eucharistic prayer needs to be seen as one of the greatest privileges and opportunities of priests, as well as one of their greatest challenges.

For laity too: Lay people need to be told on every possible occasion that the eucharistic prayer is their prayer too. They need to be informed that in the mind of the church it is the center and high point of the entire eucharistic celebration; it is the place in which their fullest participation is not only possible, but needed. They need to accept this fully in their hearts as well as minds.

Thus an important prerequisite for the proper celebration of the eucharistic prayer is the right attitude regarding the people's participation; this applies both to priest and people.

Modes of Participation

Different ways of participating: Priests need to realize that they participate in the eucharistic prayer in ways that are different from those of the rest of the assembly. They participate visually – they see the text – and they participate by speaking – they read it aloud. In contrast, the other members of the assembly only hear most of this prayer. It is thus much easier for the presider to enter into the eucharistic prayer than it is for the laity. As a consequence, presiders need to made a special effort to facilitate lay participation in this prayer.

Teaching and Preaching

Teaching: Parish ministers need to take every opportunity to teach the lay members of the community about the structure and meaning of the eucharistic prayer. They also need frequently to teach about its centrality and importance.

Preaching: Priests need to refer to the eucharistic prayer in their preaching, at least from time to time. They may recall that in describing the homily, the General Instruction of the Roman Missal (no. 41) says that “it should develop some
point of the readings or of another text from the Ordinary or from the Proper of the Mass of the day". Thus it is always legitimate to preach on the eucharistic prayer as well as on the scripture readings.

**Making connections**: In addition, priests will want to learn to make connections between the scripture readings and the eucharistic prayer chosen for the day. Both are Good News; both proclaim the paschal mystery of Jesus Christ. There is no message in the scripture readings that is not also, in some way, contained in the eucharistic prayer.

**From word to eucharist**: Finally, preaching looks forward to the life of individuals and the community after the homily. Here we often focus on the weekdays that follow the Sunday celebration. However, the remainder of the eucharistic liturgy - including the eucharistic prayer - also needs to be kept in mind. It ought to be clear to the assembly that the celebration of the word of God leads directly to the celebration of the eucharistic prayer.

**Planning and Preparation**

**Chosen beforehand**: The eucharistic prayer to be used in each celebration needs to be chosen ahead of time, not during the preface or *Holy, holy*. Furthermore, it should be chosen for some reason: either because of some particular aspect of its content, or for the sake of giving the community the full range of eucharistic theology provided in the various texts. A record should be kept of how often each eucharistic prayer is used, and for which group of people or occasion.

**Study and prayer**: The presider should then read over the eucharistic prayer chosen ahead of time, study it using one or another commentary, and make it the subject of his private prayer. Prayerful preparation serves both prayerful proclamation by the presider and prayerful participation by the assembly at large.

**The musicians**: Finally, the presider should tell the musicians which eucharistic prayer he has chosen. They will choose the music for the *Holy, holy* and Great *Amen* accordingly. It is also important for the musicians to know ahead of time which memorial acclamation the presider has chosen, or which might be most appropriate.

**Nonverbal Dimensions**

**The architecture of the church** needs to be examined to see if it is in any way an obstacle to the full participation of the congregation in the eucharistic prayer. Is the distance between the people and the altar greater than necessary? Is the altar elevated too much? Too little? It needs to be elevated enough that the people – the ones in the back as well as those in the front – can see not only the presider's head, but also the surface of the table with the gifts upon it. It should not be elevated more than that, however. If necessary, thought should be given to changing the placement of the altar.

**Clear visibility**: Are the size and shape of the altar appropriate for the eucharistic action? Is it clearly a table set for a holy meal? The altar will be
covered with a clean, attractive cloth. Candles, flowers, the microphone and the sacramentary will never obstruct the view of the congregation.

**The eucharistic bread and the wine** will be authentic symbols and not mini­malized. This means that the bread used will look like bread and the wine used will preferably be red and visible through a glass container. The eucharis­tic gifts on the table will be visible to all those praying the eucharistic prayer.

Does the one bread and one cup stand out when placed on the altar? Or do they get lost in a clutter of objects on the altar?

**Gestures and Posture of the Presider**

*Meaningful and reverent:* The gestures of the priest will be simple but mean­ingful. He will show by means of the gestures he uses what is happening in the eucharistic prayer. The gesture of presidential prayer (the *orans* gesture), the gesture of invocation at the epiclesis, the taking of bread and cup, showing these to the assembly, and the elevation, will all be carried out carefully and reverently. (He will not break the bread during the eucharistic prayer, but at the *Lamb of God.*)

**The posture of the priest** will show his role as presider and his understanding of what the eucharistic prayer is all about: erect, but neither slouched nor stiff.

**Posture of the People**

*A need for evaluation:* The posture of the people is a matter which needs careful consideration. At present there is a variety of practices across the country, and they need critical evaluation. The fact that the eucharistic prayer is a single prayer with an inherent unity rules out the use of two different pos­tures. When people stand for the preface and *Holy, holy* but then kneel; or when they stand until the beginning of the institution narrative and then kneel; or when they kneel until the memorial acclamation and then stand; – or some other similar practice – they are contradicting the unity of the eucharistic prayer.

*Being consistent:* By using two postures people are saying that some texts are not really the eucharistic prayer (the preface, for example), or are saying that one part is really important and that the rest is not as significant. This is inconsistent with the church's teaching that the whole of the eucharistic prayer is the center and high point of the eucharistic celebration.

*Kneeling:* Though we have inherited a custom of kneeling during part or all of the eucharistic prayer, this practice also needs critical evaluation. It came from a period when the people did not participate in this prayer; it was the priest's alone. Kneeling is a posture of adoration and of private devotion, neither of which is appropriate for a prayer of the community and a prayer in which full and active participation is called for.

**Priest versus people:** The use of different postures by the priest (standing) and the people (kneeling, at least in part) speaks a message in itself. It says that their roles are unequal, and that the role of the people is not only different
than that of the presider but also less active. This message is not consistent with a modern understanding of the eucharistic prayer and of whose prayer it really is – that of the entire local church.

**Standing:** A consideration of the nature of the eucharistic prayer and the intention of the church that it be entered into fully and actively by all the baptized, therefore, would seem to indicate that everyone should **stand** throughout.

**Good visibility** is required: Standing by the people has certain architectural consequences. An altar that can be seen adequately by a kneeling congregation may not be sufficiently visible to people who are standing – especially those in the back of the church. This point needs to be evaluated and if necessary, changes made in the elevation of the altar.

**Getting Ready**

**A pause:** It is best if the beginning of the eucharistic prayer is separated slightly from the end of the prayer over the gifts. Even a brief pause, during which the presider can turn to the proper place in the sacramentary, helps to set it off and indicate its separate identity. The presider should find the preface before beginning the preface dialogue, not while this is being said. Singing the preface dialogue and the preface will set the eucharistic prayer off from the liturgy of the eucharist and emphasize the importance and centrality of this prayer.

**Introduction:** The sacramentary contains the following rubric, which is seldom noted or taken advantage of: “The priest may make a brief introduction before beginning the eucharistic prayer. He may suggest reasons for giving thanks which are meaningful to those assembled for this celebration.” Of course, he may also invite the people to think of “reasons for giving thanks” silently. This is not the time for another homily or for a lecture on the eucharistic prayer. It is, however, an opportunity to invite everyone to enter fully into the action of the eucharist.

**Proclamation**

**More than reading:** The presider will proclaim the eucharistic prayer rather than just read it aloud. We are conscious of the difference between reading and proclamation with respect to the scripture readings; this also applies to the eucharistic prayer. Proclamation includes good public speaking techniques, but goes beyond these. It implies that the text has been prepared ahead of time by study and especially by prayerful reflection, that it has great meaning for the proclaimer, and that the proclaimer feels that it is very important for him to communicate this meaning to everyone present.

**A challenge:** Effective proclamation of the eucharistic prayer is one of the priest’s greatest challenges. It is more difficult than the other presidential prayers simply because of its length; the rather abstract language used in some of the prayers adds to the challenge. The presider needs to take care about the pace of his proclamation, the inflection of his voice, and the need to use different tones of voice for different parts of the prayer.
Never boring: The eucharistic prayer must never appear to be boring; the presider needs to communicate interest and enthusiasm; it needs to be engaging. The ultimate criterion of effective proclamation is whether the priest's public praying draws all the rest of the congregation into the prayer and enables their full, active, conscious and fruitful participation in the eucharistic prayer. Presiders may want to practice with audio and video tape and receive constructive suggestions from fellow priests and lay people.

Eye Contact

The eucharistic prayer is addressed to God, and it is inappropriate for the presider to be looking at the people for its entire duration. However, it is appropriate to catch their eye from time to time, especially when the text refers in a special way to the whole assembly.

Singing

Proclamation and full participation may be aided if the presider sings part or all of the eucharistic prayer. This of course will depend on the musical gifts of the presider. The preface is especially meant to be sung, as is the doxology. Priests may wish to receive coaching from qualified voice teachers.

Listening

Poor listening skills: One of the principal means of participation by the laity is through listening to the presider's proclamation. Unfortunately, our listening skills have been much eroded by exposure to the highly visual media of television and movies. This problem has to be counteracted by especially good proclamation by the presider. It may also help to mention this challenge to the assembly from time to time and to encourage the people to listen carefully as the eucharistic prayer is being proclaimed.

Active listening: Listening to the proclamation of the eucharistic prayer is not reading the text along with the presider. The General Instruction states that the assembly should listen to the proclamation of the prayer. Listening to the text involves a different sense than seeing the text. Practice is one way of learning how to listen, not just with the mind, but also with the heart. Listening to the presider in a prayerful, yet active way, makes the ideas and sentiments expressed in the eucharistic prayer our own. Listening is different than hearing what was said. The assembly does not just hear the prayer, it listens to the eucharistic prayer in a way that makes it the prayer of each individual and therefore of all those assembled.

The work of the Spirit: Listening in the assembly, because of the presence of Christ and the action of the Holy Spirit, opens up to the assembly a dimension of the liturgy that cannot be experienced by an individual alone. We can read the eucharistic prayer at home; we can pray it alone; but only in the assembly can we listen and pray it within the dynamic of Christ and the Spirit operative
in the midst of the assembly. We believe that the Holy Spirit which inspires the proclamation of the word of God in the liturgy of the word will also inspire our listening in the liturgy of the eucharist.

Acclamations

Singing the acclamations: The second principal means of participation is through the sung acclamations: the Holy, holy, memorial acclamation, Great Amen, and possibly others. The dynamics of acclamations need to be made clear. They are not interruptions in the eucharistic prayer but rather integral parts of it. They are not songs to be sung as “the people’s part,” while the priest does “his part” – they are texts of the eucharistic prayer itself.

It may be noted that the rubrics tell us that the Holy, holy is to be sung by the priest and people together. Similarly, though the priest issues the invitation to the memorial acclamation, all sing it together. The Great Amen, however, is for the people alone, the priest having sung the doxology.

Acclamations are always responses to what has just been proclaimed and heard; they indicate that the assembly embraces and endorses what has just been proclaimed. One cannot ignore the proclamation and then sing an acclamation with meaning; if one does not hear and attend to the text that is being prayed, then an acclamation is virtually meaningless (except as a purely musical exercise). Thus the people need to pay close attention to what the priest is proclaiming in order to sing the acclamation as they are meant to be sung.

Experience has shown that participation of the laity in the eucharistic prayer is improved if more than the three standard acclamations are used. Additional acclamations are encouraged in the eucharistic prayers for masses with children, and efforts are underway to provide more acclamations for the other prayers as well.

Good Celebration

Celebrating the eucharistic prayer well is not complicated. However, it does require some effort, skill and practice, as well as an appropriate understanding of its form and meaning. It also requires the right attitude.
What does it mean? Having examined the form and structure of the eucharistic prayer, and some factors that foster good celebration, we may move on to another question: What does the eucharistic prayer say and what does it mean? Because of its richness and complexity, it is helpful to examine the eucharistic prayer from several points of view. The richness of this prayer also means that only a brief introduction to its content and meaning can be given in the space available here.

We may begin with the description of the eucharistic prayer found in the General Instruction of the Roman Missal:

Now the center and summit of the entire celebration begins: the eucharistic prayer, a prayer of thanksgiving and sanctification. The priest invites the people to lift up their hearts to the Lord in prayer and thanks, he unites them with himself in the prayer he addresses in their name to the Father through Jesus Christ. The meaning of the prayer is that the entire congregation joins itself to Christ in acknowledging the great things God has done and in offering the sacrifice. (GIRM 54)

Context and Action

The whole celebration: In order to unpack this statement and take a broad approach to the content and meaning of the eucharistic prayer, we will begin by examining its context in the eucharistic celebration as a whole.

Not in isolation: The eucharistic prayer does not exist in isolation, nor can it be properly understood apart from the remainder of the “liturgy of the eucharist” in the narrow sense, and from the remainder of the entire eucharistic celebration.

Preparation and communion: The eucharistic prayer is immediately preceded by the preparation of the altar and gifts, and it is immediately followed by the communion rite.

In the preparation of the altar and the gifts, the priest moves to the altar, the table is set, representatives of the people bring up bread and wine and present these to the priest, the gifts are placed on the altar with prayer; the entire action concludes with the prayer over the gifts.

God is blessed: Though this action could be carried out without any words at all, at the present time we say:

Blessed are you, Lord, God of all creation.
Through your goodness we have this bread to offer,
which earth has given and human hands have made.
It will become for us the bread of life.
Blessed are you, Lord, God of all creation.
Through your goodness we have this wine to offer,
fruit of the vine and work of human hands.
It will become our spiritual drink.
This already speaks eloquently of the bread and wine and of the eucharistic action.

The communion rite begins with the Lord's Prayer and moves on to the sign of peace, both of which have a preparatory character. Then the bread is broken and (if appropriate) wine is poured into several cups. The people process with song, and all share the body and blood of the Lord. After communion there is a period of reflection, and then the prayer after communion is said.

A meal prayer: From this alone, it becomes clear that the eucharistic prayer is a meal prayer. It is a prayer said over bread and wine brought from the community. It is a prayer said over bread and wine that will soon be shared by the community to nourish and to unite them. Whatever else it is, the eucharistic prayer is a grace before the meal, and such graces always express thanksgiving to God for the food that will be shared.

Liturgy of the word: The eucharistic prayer also follows the liturgy of the word and constitutes a unity with it. In the words of the General Instruction:

The Mass is made up as it were of the liturgy of the word and the liturgy of the eucharist, two parts so closely connected that they form but one single act of worship. For in the Mass the table of God's word and of Christ's body is laid for the people of God to receive from it instruction and food. (GIRM 8)

Both response and culmination: It is true to say both that the eucharistic prayer (in fact, the entire liturgy of the eucharist) is a response to the word, and that the liturgy of the word is a preparation for the eucharistic prayer.

The eucharistic prayer is similar to the liturgy of the word in several ways. In both the story of God's love for humanity is proclaimed; in both we respond to this story. The readings are concluded with "This is the word/gospel of the Lord," while in the eucharistic prayer we proclaim, "The mystery of faith." The liturgy of the word includes a profession of faith; the eucharistic prayer is a profession of faith. In both parts of the liturgy we pray in intercession for the church and the world.

Gathering and sending forth: Finally, the eucharistic prayer is set in a context of gathering of the people of God and their going forth to live the paschal mystery of Jesus Christ in their daily lives. In the gathering rites the ecclesial Body of Christ becomes visible; in the eucharistic prayer we consecrate the eucharistic Body and Blood of Christ. Both are acts of the baptized and consecrated sisters and brothers of Jesus Christ, called and united in order to worship God and serve others. As with all other parts of the eucharistic celebration, the eucharistic prayer is the action of the entire gathered people.

Thanksgiving and Praise

The General Instruction describes the eucharistic prayer as "a prayer of thanksgiving and sanctification. The priest invites the people to lift up their hearts to the Lord in prayer and thanks. . .". (GIRM 54)
Other official documents also stress the note of thanksgiving.

[The eucharistic prayer is] a prayer of thanksgiving and praise to the Father, as well as of petitions addressed to him. . . .¹

The character of the eucharistic prayer that must have precedence therefore is that it is a giving of thanks for the entire mystery of salvation or for some feature of that mystery being celebrated in the liturgy according to the different days, feasts, seasons or rites.²

The principal orientation of the eucharistic prayer is thanksgiving. This is indicated by the title “eucharistic,” a word whose Greek root simply means thanksgiving.

Preface dialogue: The eucharistic prayer begins by referring to thanksgiving. In the preface dialogue we say:

Let us give thanks to the Lord our God. It is right to give him thanks and praise.

and the introduction to the preface often begins:

Father, it is our duty and our salvation, always and everywhere to give you thanks (through your beloved Son, Jesus Christ.)

The institution narrative tells us that Jesus gave thanks and praise and that we are doing the same as his memorial.

He took bread and gave you thanks. Again he gave you thanks and praise.

The words “thanks” and “thanksgiving” are sometimes used in other parts of the prayer as well.

We come to you, Father, with praise and thanksgiving, through Jesus Christ your Son.³

We thank you for counting us worthy to stand in your presence and serve you.⁴

We offer you in thanksgiving this holy and living sacrifice.⁵

³ Eucharistic prayer 1
⁴ Eucharistic prayer 2
⁵ Eucharistic prayer 3
Praise is closely associated with thanksgiving. Glory is sometimes used together with praise, or as an equivalent term.

Praise and/or glory is the main note of the conclusions of the prefaces. For example:

Earth unites with heaven
to sing the new song of creation,
as we adore and praise you for ever.

Other preface conclusions contain the following phrases:

proclaim your glory
hymn of (your) praise
the hymn of your glory
triumpant hymn of praise
sing (forever) to your glory
we sing your unending praise
song of joy
praise your glory for ever
proclaiming your glory
praise you for ever
glorify the wonders of your power
adore and praise you for ever
unending praise
we bless and praise your greatness

The Holy holy: Such phrases at the end of the preface identify the Holy holy as a song of praise and glory. Furthermore, the first sentence of the eucharistic prayer following this hymn is itself a prayer of praise:

Lord, you are holy indeed,
the fountain of all holiness.⁶

Vision and hope: Toward the end of the eucharistic prayer we look forward to the day when we will praise God in heaven:

Then, in your kingdom,
freed from the corruption of sin and death,
we shall sing your glory with every creature
through Christ our Lord,
through whom you give us everything that is good.⁷

Doxology: Finally, we conclude with the doxology, itself a song of praise.

Through him, with him, in him,
in the unity of the Holy Spirit,
all glory and honor is yours,
almighty Father,
for ever and ever. Amen.

⁶Eucharistic prayer 2
⁷Eucharistic prayer 4
Within the eucharistic prayer, thanksgiving takes various forms. One of these is recitation of the wonderful acts of God throughout history, especially in Jesus Christ and the Holy Spirit. Following Jewish custom, we give thanks to God by telling ourselves and others about God's great love, mercy, patience, forgiveness, justice, and other qualities. This is not done in an abstract manner, but by recounting the great stories of our tradition in which these qualities of God have been manifested in God's dealing with humankind. This may be called the "story" dimension of the eucharistic prayer.

In our contemporary eucharistic prayers, "story" begins in the preface, and may continue after the Holy holy in the body of the prayer prior to the start of the epiclesis. After the first epiclesis, story telling continues in the account of the institution, and then in the anamnesis. Our story is projected into the future at the end of the eucharistic prayer, when we envision life in the presence of God.

The thanksgiving expressed by storytelling is interrupted several times, however, when thanksgiving is expressed in other ways. One of these ways is that of "consecration," or prayer in which God is asked to send the Holy Spirit upon the holy gifts and upon the holy people. This is the epiclesis, which in our contemporary eucharistic prayers is divided into two sections. Here we ask for sanctification, consecration or transformation, here used as synonyms. We pray that things and people change as a result of the presence and action of the Holy Spirit.

The third principal way in which thanksgiving is expressed is through petition: the intercessions for the church, the living, the dead, and the world. Commemoration of the saints is incorporated into the intercessions. Having thanked God for God's loving actions in the past and in the present, we feel confident – in Jesus Christ and the Holy Spirit – that God will continue to act in similar ways in the future; therefore we ask God to continue to care for the church, etc.

Thus the entire eucharistic prayer is one of thanksgiving, and this is expressed in three main ways: story, consecration (or invocation), and petition. These are not arranged in a completely linear fashion, one interrupts the other.

A Trinitarian Prayer

God, Christ, Spirit: The eucharistic prayer is trinitarian in orientation and in structure. It is addressed to God the first person of the trinity, prayed through Jesus Christ, and prayed in the power of the Holy Spirit. The address to God is repeated at intervals through the whole of the prayer; the Holy Spirit is referred to at least in the two parts of the epiclesis; and Jesus Christ is often referred to in the preface or post-sanctus thanksgiving and always in the institution narrative and anamnesis.
The three persons of the trinity are referred to together in the doxology of the eucharistic prayer, which is a particular high point. The doxology is a proclamation and profession of faith; we name the name of the triune God as the climax of our great prayer of thanksgiving and sanctification. It sums up the eucharistic prayer. The doxology is accompanied by the elevation of the consecrated bread and wine, making it clear that this is the high point and completion of the entire prayer.

Though the prayer has referred to the Risen Christ in heaven just prior to the doxology, when we say “through him...” and hold up the consecrated bread and wine, we also identify the “him” of the doxology with the Body and Blood of Christ that are elevated.

Epiclesis and institution: The eucharistic prayer is also trinitarian in another way. Though the entire prayer is addressed to God the first person, the epiclesis refers to the Holy Spirit in a special way while the account of the institution and anamnesis refer to Jesus Christ in a special way. The consecratory function of the eucharistic prayer is thus “shared” among the three persons of the trinity by the way the prayer is structured. We are equally correct in saying that the entire prayer effects the consecration, in saying that the epiclesis has a consecratory function, and in saying that the account of the institution is consecratory. Though our immediate tradition focuses on the institution in this regard, in fact the matter is much more complicated and much more the work of all three persons of the trinity.

All this has important consequences with respect to the participation of the laity in the eucharistic prayer. Though we correctly say that the entire prayer is the prayer of all the baptized, it is the presider who is especially associated with the account of the institution because he recites the words of Christ and holds the bread and the cup.

The epiclesis, however, is clearly worded in the first person plural: it is a “we" prayer, and the “we" refers to the entire assembly.
Integral parts of a whole: Many aspects of the eucharistic prayer only come to light when we respectfully attend to its basic structure and themes and see these elements not in isolation, but as integral parts interacting to constitute one composite whole. The adage “One cannot see the forest for the trees” is often applicable to the way we look at the eucharistic prayer. Before attending to the eucharistic prayer in its entirety from the introductory dialogue to the Great Amen, we split it up into various parts which we designate preface, sanctus, consecration, institution narrative, memorial, epiclesis, doxology.

An inner coherence: Needless to say, there is some legitimacy to this approach. However, we run the risk of losing sight of the overall thrust of the eucharistic prayer. There is an inner coherence to the entire eucharistic prayer which must be respected and not tampered with. History provides us with sufficient evidence that we get ourselves into serious trouble when we isolate one of the parts and give it such prominence that we no longer see that it functions adequately only when it is part of the whole. Isolating a part will only lessen the intelligibility of the eucharistic prayer itself. It may even seriously distort its real meaning. If, on the other hand, we respect the integrity of the eucharistic prayer, we are bound to discover an immense wealth.

A prayer of faith: One of the principal characteristics of the eucharistic prayer is that in it the church speaks its eucharistic faith most authoritatively. This great prayer is the most privileged expression of the faith of the church. If we want to know what the church believes the eucharist is all about, then we may safely have recourse to the eucharistic prayer. When we do this, not only do we understand the eucharist better, but we discover a perfect summation of the basic tenets of the church’s faith.

A profession of faith: If we respect the inner coherence of the entire eucharistic prayer, we will have no difficulty discovering that it is, in fact, no less than the church’s profession of faith. And it is a profession of faith that easily matches the structure, beauty, contents, and weight of either the Nicene or Apostles’ Creed. Note the beautiful parallel between the eucharistic prayer and the church’s creed.

Eucharistic Prayer 4 (EP 4) The Creed

Father in heaven, it is right that we should give you thanks and glory I believe in God the Father

Father, you so loved the world that in the fullness of time you sent your only Son to be our Saviour I believe in Jesus Christ

Father, may this Holy Spirit I believe in the Holy Spirit
Lord, by your Holy Spirit, gather all who share this one bread and one cup into the one body of Christ.

Father, in your mercy grant also to us, your children, to enter our heavenly inheritance.

**A new point of view:** It may very well be that we have never viewed the eucharistic prayer from this perspective. But if we take a closer look, we see very clearly that it contains the same basic features as the creed. We will not find this surprising if we remember that the shaping of the classical eucharistic prayers happened at about the same time that the church formulated the dogma of the trinity at the early ecumenical councils.

**Ecumenical implications:** This parallel is of more than merely historical interest. It also has remarkable ecumenical implications. In 1982 the Faith and Order Commission of the World Council of Churches released its so-called Lima Document, *Baptism, Eucharist, and Ministry* (BEM). In the section on the meaning of the eucharist it states: “Although the eucharist is essentially one complete act, it will be considered here under the following aspects:

- Thanksgiving to the Father
- Memorial (Anamnesis) of Christ
- Invocation of the Spirit
- Communion of the Faithful
- Meal of the Kingdom.”

**A new perspective:** Note again the exact parallel with what we discovered when we compared the eucharistic prayer with the church’s creed. The way the *Baptism, Eucharist, and Ministry* document draws these aspects from the classical eucharistic prayers and from the church’s creed provides a setting in which the eucharistic controversies of the past, such as “the Mass as Sacrifice” and “the Real Presence”, can be dealt with anew and possibly even transcended. We must not forget that, for a great part at least, these controversies resulted from isolating certain legitimate aspects of the eucharist from a more comprehensive view of the eucharistic prayer. When we let the eucharistic prayer be the source and guide of our eucharistic theology, the possibilities are far-reaching.

Thus we see the following scheme emerge:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>EP 4</th>
<th>Creed</th>
<th>BEM</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Father in heaven, it is right that we should give you thanks and glory</td>
<td>I believe in God the Father</td>
<td>Thanksgiving to the Father</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Father, you so loved the world that in the fullness of time you sent your only Son to be our Saviour</td>
<td>I believe in Jesus Christ</td>
<td>Memorial (Anamnesis) of Christ</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Father, may this Holy Spirit sanctify these offerings</td>
<td>I believe in the Holy Spirit</td>
<td>Invocation of the Spirit</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Lord, by your Holy Spirit, gather all who share this bread and wine into the one body of Christ

the holy catholic Church

Communion of the Faithful

Father, in your mercy grant also to us, your children, to enter into our heavenly inheritance

the resurrection of the body and the life everlasting

Meal of the Kingdom

The Christian life: We should mention one more item that flows from a respectful attention to the integrity of the eucharistic prayer. The analysis and comparison of the eucharistic prayer and the creed shows that each of them is a brief and condensed, but quite authoritative summing up of what the Christian faith is all about. All three, the eucharistic prayer, the creed and the Christian life are thoroughly trinitarian, ecclesial and eschatological.

Trinitarian: The Christian life is trinitarian because as Christians we are privileged to share in the intimate life of the Trinity:

• we know ourselves to be the sons and daughters of God

• in faith and baptism we have been grafted onto Jesus Christ

• the life-giving Spirit dwells in us.

Ecclesial: The Christian life is ecclesial because we are incorporated into the Body of Christ, the church, in which we are brothers and sisters to each other.

Eschatological: The Christian life is eschatological because all that we are as Christians still waits to be brought to completion when Christ comes in glory and we are fully raised to life in him.

When we align these basic characteristics of the Christian life with the eucharistic prayer and the creed, the parallel becomes obvious.

Father in heaven, it is right that we should give you thanks and glory

I believe in God the Father

We are sons and daughters of God

Father, you so loved the world that in the fullness of time you sent your only Son to be our Savior

I believe in Jesus Christ

We enter the Paschal Mystery of Christ

Father, may this Holy Spirit sanctify these offerings

I believe in the Holy Spirit

We are filled with the Spirit

Lord, by your Holy Spirit, gather all who share this bread and wine into the one body of Christ

the holy catholic Church

We are members of the Body of Christ
Father, in your mercy grant also to us, your children, to enter into our heavenly inheritance

the resurrection of the body and the life everlasting

We live in hope of future glory.

A unifying prayer: What conclusion may we draw from this? It is no exaggeration to suggest that the eucharistic prayer, the creed and the Christian life itself virtually coincide. If that is so, then the eucharistic prayer indeed deserves all our attention. The more we become familiar with it, the more cohesion it will bring to a good number of aspects of the Christian faith that all too often seem fragmented.¹

¹The keen observer may be inclined to wonder about the suitability of having both the creed and the eucharistic prayer in the present Order of Mass. Is this not an unnecessary duplication which may distract from the importance of the eucharistic prayer? Louis Weil makes some pertinent observations on this issue in “Proclamation of faith in the eucharist”, in J. Neil Alexander, ed., Time and Communion. In Honor of Thomas Julian Taley (Washington: The Pastoral Press 1990) 279-290
Rediscovering the importance and centrality of the eucharistic prayer in the church’s celebration of the eucharist has the welcome side effect of helping us rediscover aspects of the eucharist that may have been forgotten for too long. It may also correct a focus on aspects that may have been overemphasized or that had come to lead an almost independent existence.

New developments: What has happened to the eucharistic prayer in our church over the last twenty-five years affects our eucharistic understanding and practice, because it is precisely in the eucharistic prayer that the church professes its eucharistic faith in the most authoritative way. A catechesis on the eucharist that is guided by what the church professes about the eucharist in the eucharistic prayer can enrich our appreciation of the eucharist. It can also help the church recover an understanding of itself that is solidly grounded in the mystery of the eucharist.

A variety of prayers: In this regard we cannot overlook the impact of being able to work with no less than nine officially approved eucharistic prayers. This variety is a clear indication that it is impossible for one eucharistic prayer to profess the church’s eucharistic faith in all its fullness. Or, if this seems too negative, we might say that the church’s eucharistic faith can be proclaimed adequately and authoritatively in more than one way.

Shifts in understanding: We should not be surprised, therefore, when our increasing familiarity with the entire eucharistic prayer, with the way it is meant to function in the eucharist, and with the wide range of officially approved texts, leads us to some significant shifts in how we understand the eucharist. This does not mean that we will end up with mutually exclusive understandings of the eucharist, depending on which eucharistic prayer we take as our point of departure. It is more a matter of shifts in emphasis.

The Roman Canon No Longer The Only Eucharistic Prayer

Sacrifice: A case in point is the thorny issue of the eucharist as sacrifice. More needs to be said about this than can be said here, and what follows does not pretend to be an exhaustive treatment of the question. It is simply an initial probing of how greater familiarity with the eucharistic prayer is affecting our understanding of the eucharist as sacrifice. We cannot close our eyes to the fact that the breaking of the monopoly of the Roman Canon by the addition of eight other eucharistic prayers has created a new context for dealing with this question.

A major motif: The dominant characteristic of the Roman Canon is the ‘offering and sacrifice’ motif. Of course, other motifs are present as well, but this one is clearly the most prominent. The other eucharistic prayers do not play down or hide the ‘offering and sacrifice’ motif, but they situate it differently. Other motifs which interact with the ‘offering and sacrifice’ motif are placed
alongside it. The point is simply that liturgical reform, which highlights the entire eucharistic prayer and introduces various eucharistic prayers, inevitably affects the issue of the eucharist as sacrifice.

**Ecumenical Significance**

**A new approach:** An example of the impact of liturgical reform is the progress made in ecumenical dialogues on the difficult issue of the eucharist as sacrifice. A focus on the entire eucharistic prayer rather than on one section of it, together with the variety of eucharistic prayers, made it possible to approach the issue of eucharistic sacrifice in a new way. What four centuries of theological discussion and controversy were unable to resolve has come close to resolution now that theological discussion stays close to the liturgical shape the eucharist has had since Vatican II.

**Theological dialogues:** The best witnesses to this progress are the documents that have resulted from the ecumenical dialogues between Anglicans and Roman Catholics (ARCIC’s *Final Report* in 1982), between Lutherans and Roman Catholics (*The Eucharist* in 1978) and the work of the World Council of Churches’ Faith and Order Commission (the so-called *BEM* document in 1982). Although all the difficulties are not resolved, what theologians from different churches are jointly able to affirm about the eucharist, and especially about the question of eucharistic sacrifice, is remarkable. This would be simply unthinkable without a more liturgically shaped theology of the eucharist.

**Impact on Roman Catholic Eucharistic Faith**

**For Roman Catholics too:** But surely it is not only on the ecumenical level that the recovery of the centrality of the eucharistic prayer has an impact on the church's eucharistic faith. The understanding of the eucharist and the way it is celebrated by Roman Catholics has also been affected by this recovery. This is particularly true in relation to the eucharist as sacrifice. In this case I am not thinking so much of the more technical and scholarly literature on this issue, but of what happens in the parish. There may be a fair distance between these two levels.

**At the popular level** it is not difficult to discern two different positions or attitudes on the issue of sacrifice. One is quite adamant in maintaining sacrificial language when it come to identifying the primary characteristic of the eucharist. In this view there simply is no other way of speaking and dealing with the eucharist. The other view, however, is reluctant to use any sort of sacrificial language in reference to the eucharist. It does not know what to do with sacrificial language when it comes to the eucharist.

**A tricky question:** The difficulty surfaces quite often in the question: "Is the eucharist a sacrifice or not?" This question is not easily answered. Moreover, one wonders whether this is really a question, or a statement about the eucharist that must remain unchallenged because, to the questioner at least,

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1 An article by Jef Lamberts inspired the question and some of my reflections on the question: "Ist die eucharistie dan geen offer?", in *Tijdschrift voor Liturgie* 73 (1988) 187-198
the answer is self-evident. The fact that the eucharist has been called "the sacrifice of the Mass" for centuries does not seem to leave much room for speaking about the eucharist in any other way. But, actually, a fair amount remains unsaid on the issue and what is unsaid has a great deal to do with the shape of the question. If we bring forward what is behind the question it may help us see that, indeed, it is not so easy to answer with a straightforward yes or no.

The Influence Of The Roman Canon

A monopoly: Why has the sacrificial interpretation of the eucharist gained such a privileged position? One important factor is the immense influence that the Roman Canon has had on the shaping of eucharistic language. It has had a virtual monopoly position in the West for almost fourteen centuries. The Roman Canon is heavy with 'offering and sacrifice' language.

This is not to suggest that the Roman Canon must therefore be discredited or rejected. On the contrary, the Roman Canon too is an authentic expression of the church's faith. But if it so dominates the eucharistic scene that it seems to make exclusive claims about the eucharist, we may wonder whether it indeed serves the church very well. Does this heavy emphasis on 'offering and sacrifice' language not crowd out other equally important aspects of the eucharist? Does it not make the eucharist too one-sidedly sacrificial?

A loss of thanksgiving: The danger of crowding out other important aspects is not hypothetical. The best example is the theme of thanksgiving. 'Offering and sacrifice' language is so prominent in the Roman Canon that it virtually overshadows the theme of thanksgiving, though this is certainly the primary characteristic of any eucharistic prayer. With its heavy emphasis on 'offering and sacrifice' language, almost to the exclusion of the theme of thanksgiving, it is not difficult to see how the eucharist came to be spoken of as the sacrifice of the Mass.

A narrow definition: But that is not all. The category of sacrifice also underwent a significant narrowing of focus. This was the result of developments in christology, in which the notion of sacrifice was almost exclusively applied to the death of Christ. This emphasis strengthened the use of sacrificial language in eucharistic discourse, because it is in the eucharist that the death of Christ is made present albeit in a sacramental way. The appearance of an imposing crucifix above the altar is very much part of this.

The popular understanding: What is of particular concern here is how these developments affected the popular understanding of the eucharist. What eucharistic practices evolve out of this one-sidedly sacrificial understanding of the eucharist? This is not an idle question, because we must not forget that people found the sacrificial imagery very appealing. These eucharistic practices provoked objections by the Reformers, who had great difficulty with the popular notion of the sacrifice of the Mass and various Mass practices that this popular notion spawned. Today we know that many of their objections against existing practices were well-founded.

The popular perception: Our concern is not so much what theologians said at that time or what the church at the Council of Trent officially taught about the sacrifice of the Mass in order to curb the excesses of some practices and to refute or answer objections of the Reformers. At the level of theological
reflection and official teaching, many significant and necessary distinctions were introduced when it came to the issue of the Mass as sacrifice. But these nuances did not always find their way into the popular perception about the Mass, and at the popular level we see a less nuanced understanding of the eucharist at work.

The Council of Trent: Much of the popular understanding of the Reformation period did not simply disappear with the Council of Trent. Apart from the most blatant excesses, much of it remained intact in the Counter-Reformation climate that prevailed in the Roman Catholic Church until recently. It was only with the liturgical reform of this century and especially with eucharistic reform mandated by Vatican II that the ground was laid for a new understanding of the eucharist and eucharistic practices.

The question referred to earlier, “Is the eucharist a sacrifice or not?” points to the shift in emphasis regarding our understanding of the eucharist. This question would most likely not be raised if our increasing familiarity with the entire eucharistic prayer and with the wide range of officially approved eucharistic prayers did not awaken us to the potential implications of the revision. This is the reason why it might be helpful to expose the assumptions that lie behind this question. I may well be running the risk of oversimplification but, considering the importance of the issue, I must try to describe how the eucharist is popularly perceived when sacrificial language is thought to be the only proper way of identifying the eucharist. How has the eucharist functioned and, in many instances, how does it continue to function for those that insist that the eucharist can only be understood as sacrifice?

A Popular Perception Of ‘The Sacrifice Of The Mass’

Five points: There are at least five points that must be made before we know whether the question “Is the eucharist a sacrifice or not?” can be answered satisfactorily.

1. The custom of speaking of the Mass as a sacrifice is not an isolated phenomenon. It has much to do with the way in which religion – how we relate to God – is understood. A sacrificial system was once thought to be an inherent part of every religion. If then the Christian religion is the most eminent religion, the argument went, it too must have a sacrifice at its centre. The sacrifice of the Mass, because of its relationship to the sacrifice of Jesus, seems to fit this notion of religion very well, because here we deal with the sacrifice of the God-man Jesus Christ in whom, as in no other, our relationship with God is assured.

2. What notion of God is behind our question? Is it perhaps assumed that in order to have our relationship with God put right, God needs our sacrifices? Does God seek proportionate restitution for offenses committed? Are sacrifices necessary to obtain God’s favour? Must the eucharist fit into that slot?

3. Speaking of the Mass as sacrifice is, to a very large extent, conditioned by a particular view of Christ’s death which is made present in the eucharist in “an unbloody manner”. But, without minimizing the salvific significance of Jesus’ death, can his death be captured solely by the category of sacrifice? Moreover, do we not run the risk of isolating the death of Jesus from the rest of his life and above all from his being raised from the dead? Why this narrow preoccupation with the death of Jesus? Does it have anything to do with the notion
that, if something is to be a sacrifice, it must be experienced as negative and even painful?

4. Historically, the increased prominence given to the notion of sacrifice had a lot to do with a significant shift in how the eucharist was understood. From being the Christian community's weekly celebration of Christ's victory over death and the forces of evil, of the church's anticipation of the meal in the heavenly kingdom, it increasingly became the sacrifice of the Mass which the priest could offer for a variety of purposes, especially to obtain God's forgiveness for the dead. The question is whether the almost exclusive designation of the Mass as sacrifice did not come close to justifying popular practices which obscured the primary significance of the community's eucharist.

5. Closely linked to these practices is a certain notion of priesthood. The priest tends to be seen as a cultic figure whose primary task is to offer the sacrifice of the Mass. In this case the priest ceases to act as the one who presides over the faith and worship life of the assembled community and who, as such, has a place within the community. He became more a person who alone was empowered to perform a sacred action for the sake of the community or of certain persons.

Reason for hesitation: If what these five points taken together represent is behind the question "Is the eucharist a sacrifice or not?", then we have reason to hesitate giving a straightforward "yes" to the question. A eucharistic understanding and practice that are so exclusively sacrificial – and sacrificial in a very narrow sense, because it is only the death of Jesus that is kept in view – inevitably give rise to another question, one about Christ. For one thing is certain: every eucharistic theology embodies and reflects a christology. The eucharist can simply not be understood apart from the Mystery of Christ which is made present in it.

The Mystery Of Christ A Unique Sacrifice

The death of Jesus: Establishing whether the eucharist itself can properly be called a sacrifice can only be done after having established whether a sacrificial understanding of the death of Jesus is the most apt and the only possible interpretation. It is indeed true that in some biblical passages and in the tradition of the church the salvific significance of the death of Jesus has been expressed in the language of sacrifice. But in this predication of sacrifice to the death of Jesus something very significant happens to the notion of sacrifice, particularly to the way sacrifice functions in our relationship with God. If the popular notion of sacrifice evokes the idea that we offer something to God, then we must realize that this is no longer applicable in the Christian dispensation.

In Jesus something entirely new is on the scene and this overturns what we might hope to achieve with our sacrificial practices, namely to put our relationship with God right. What we hope to achieve is accomplished, but by utterly different means than our sacrifices. I am reminded of David Power's reflection on the Suffering Servant theme which is so crucial to the significance of Jesus and, consequently, to the significance of the eucharist:

He is an innocent person, sent to the people by [God] as his messenger, and though persecuted and reviled by them he is obedient, compassionate, uncomplaining in his death. He achieves all that sacrifice cannot, with its attempts at substitution, its shedding of blood and its making of
offerings. Indeed, the advent of such a figure on the scene of history rend­
ders sacrifices unnecessary, if not actually obscene. The schema of jus­
tice which prevails in the making of sacrifice offerings is replaced by the
schema of compassion, which witnesses to love and mercy. Expiation is
brought about, not by the offerings of the people, but through the witness
given in the sufferings and death of the servant, on account of which God
manifests him in glory in the eyes of the Gentile nations.9

A bond with God: What the sacrifices people offer intend to achieve, namely
the bonding between God and us, has already been accomplished. But it has
been accomplished in an unheard-of fashion, so much so that the sacrifices
people make must give way to the utterly new mode in which it is accomplished.

The self-giving of Jesus: This new mode is the self-giving of Jesus in obedi­
ence to God and in life-giving service to us. It is a self-giving which is not limited
to his death, but which characterizes his entire life and culminates in his death
on the cross. It is a self-giving unto the end which, in the final analysis, embod­
ies God’s love for us. The Father’s raising of Jesus from the dead for our sake
seals for ever the covenant between God and us. In Jesus God gives to us, not
we to God. In Jesus God reaches out to us and heals a wounded humanity.

The Eucharist A Sacrifice Of Praise And Thanksgiving

The Mystery of Christ: All this remains true as well when as church we are
privileged, in the power of the Spirit, to make this Mystery of Christ present
among us in the celebration of the eucharist. But if the primary characteristic
of the self-giving of Jesus accepted by the Father is the accomplishment by
God of what no human sacrifice could accomplish, namely communion
between God and us, then this will inevitably colour the church’s celebration
of the eucharist as well. Nothing in the celebration of the eucharist can in the
slightest suggest that we can put back in place what in the self-giving of
Jesus has been overturned. The celebration of the eucharist will be and can
only be the church’s acknowledgment and acceptance in praise and thanks­
giving of what God offers us in Jesus. This point has been made with great
force by Enrico Mazza:

Given the impossibility of a true exchange of gifts, human beings can offer
only their thanks. This is the sole gift that can be given to the giver who is
God. By our praise and thanksgiving, we confess the greatness of his
work and his gift. In the Eucharist, we reach the high point of the order of
gifts, and we even pass beyond that order, since our gratitude, the gift we
offer to God in exchange, does not represent an exchange in the true and
proper sense. In fact, gratitude is simply the way of receiving and accept­
ing a gift. We even pass beyond the order of giving, because here there is
no return of an authentic gift on our part (such a return is simply impossi­
bile for us, since all we have has been received). Yet we do not leave
behind the logic of the ‘system of gifts’ since our response or ‘return’,
namely our thanksgiving, is defined as ‘truly right and just, and our duty.’

9 David Power, "Words that crack: the uses of ‘sacrifice’ in eucharistic discourse", in Kevin Sea­
soltz, ed., Living Bread, Saving Cup. Readings on the Eucharist (Collegeville: Liturgical Press
1982) 162-163
In this passage to the eucharist, the 'system of gifts' loses its content, since no true exchange of gifts is possible with God, but the form of the system is retained because gratitude, which is our way of accepting God's gift, becomes a hymn of praise and thanksgiving that rises to God and is formally offered to him.3

**Hymn of praise and thanksgiving:** This is precisely what the eucharistic prayer is: "a hymn of praise and thanksgiving that rises to God and is formally offered to him." If we offer anything in the eucharist, it is first and foremost this prayer of praise and thanksgiving to God that the Spirit dwelling in us individually and communally prompts us to make. Here is where the Spirit-filled Body of Christ, the assembled community, gives voice to its heart in a prayer of praise and thanksgiving that proclaims the great deed of God's love and compassion embodied in the life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. But this proclamation of the Paschal Mystery is such that it makes this very Mystery effectively present among us. This is followed by intercession that expresses the hope that God's deed of love and compassion in Jesus may have its desired effect on our still wounded and disjointed world until Christ comes in full glory.4

**These are the basic elements** that constitute the church’s eucharist. They come to light in an attentive reading of the eucharistic prayer. This basic thrust is much clearer now that we are attentive to the integrity of the entire eucharistic prayer and the monopoly of the Roman Canon has been broken by the introduction of the new eucharistic prayers.

The Church Enters Into The Self-giving Of Jesus

**A sharper focus:** Does this call into question the eucharist as sacrifice? Hardly. What it does do is bring into sharper focus the unique way in which God, through Christ, has redefined humanity's way of relating to God. In the celebration of the eucharist the Christian community never ceases to thank God for this and to pray that this redefinition will never cease to have its desired effect on our world. The most appropriate day for this is the Day of the Lord on which the faith community must assemble to celebrate the Mystery to which it owes its identity as Body of Christ. Needless to say, that does not invalidate the celebration of the eucharist on other days or on other occasions, but these other celebrations of the eucharist must not distract us from the principal purpose for which Christ gives the eucharist to his faith community.

**More cautious:** It follows from this that we will be more cautious about the popular notion that the primary purpose of offering the eucharist is for a variety of particular causes. Noble though these causes may be, they hardly justify, as the popular expression has it, "having a Mass said". Such causes are more appropriately dealt with in the restored general intercessions. This would free the eucharist from the need to serve purposes that tend to be too narrow. It would enable the celebration of the eucharist to be once again the source from

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4 For a more comprehensive presentation on the eucharistic prayer and its impact on our understanding of the eucharist, see Ambroos Verheul, "L'Eucharistie mémoire, présence et sacrifice du Seigneur d'après les racines juives de l'eucharistie", *Questions Liturgiques* 69 (1988) 125-154
which the Christian community can draw strength and hope. It flows from what
the faith community professes and proclaims in the rediscovered eucharistic
prayer. When the faith community assembles on the Day of the Lord it is once
again brought in touch with its very roots and is empowered for its mission. As
those who have been transformed by the Spirit and incorporated into Christ in
baptism we have been made one with him. In the celebration of the eucharist,
which makes present the unique self-giving of Jesus in obedience to God and
in life-giving service to others, we are drawn into Jesus' self-giving.

Self-giving of the church: It is from this perspective that the eucharist can be
understood as the self-giving of the church. This must not be understood in the
sense that the church can offer something apart from Jesus Christ or that the
church can offer Christ again to God. When the church as the community of
baptized men and women celebrates the eucharist, then the self-giving of
Jesus that is celebrated also includes the self-giving of those who have been
privileged to enter into the Mystery of Christ their Lord who is the Head of the
Body of which they are the members.

Sharing the eucharist: Their living from and entering into that self-giving of
Jesus becomes concrete in the sharing of the eucharistic bread and wine which
in sacramental form contain the self-giving of Jesus. After all, that is part of the
 uniqueness of the consuming of this eucharistic bread and wine, as so insight­
fully expressed by Saint Augustine. He said that every ordinary consuming of
bread and wine changes the bread and wine into those who eat and drink; but
the consuming of the Body and Blood of Christ changes us into what we con­
sume.5 It is then through, with and in Jesus Christ and in the power of the Holy
Spirit that the lives of those who engage in the church's eucharistic activity
become a living sacrifice of praise to God and life-giving service to the world.

New light: There is no question that a rediscovery of the importance and cen­
trality of the eucharistic prayer sheds new light on the notion of the eucharist
as sacrifice. This does not impoverish the eucharist. Instead, it emphasizes
aspects of the eucharist that have been neglected for too long. Paying atten­
tion to them can only enrich the church's celebration of the eucharist.

5 Saint Augustine, Sermo 227
Following a consideration of the contemporary eucharistic prayers of the Roman church as a whole, six of our official prayers will be examined individually. (The three eucharistic prayers for masses with children are not considered here for lack of space.) The study of these texts involves three steps:

- The text of each eucharistic prayer is printed in full. It should be read, pondered, meditated upon, and studied.
- Alternative translations are provided at times. As our present English texts are all translations from Latin or another language, alternative versions are also possible. In some cases scholars feel that the present English version could be improved, and some of these suggestions are provided here.
- A brief commentary is provided for the first four prayers; space precludes such a commentary for the two eucharistic prayers for masses of reconciliation. The best one-volume commentary on the contemporary Roman Catholic eucharistic prayers is that of Enrico Mazza: *The Eucharistic Prayers of the Roman Rite*, translated by M. J. O'Connell (New York: Pueblo Publishing Co. 1986), and it may be consulted for more detailed study.

Parts of the eucharistic prayer that are the same, or almost the same, in all the eucharistic prayers and which have already been considered in some detail previously will not receive further comment here.

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**Eucharistic Prayer I**

*(Roman Canon)*

We come to you, Father,
with praise and thanksgiving,
through Jesus Christ your Son.
Through him we ask you to accept and bless
these gifts we offer you in sacrifice.

The first section of the Roman Canon repeats the note of praise and thanksgiving already stated in the preface. It then asks that God accept the sacrifice we are about to offer; it refers to the bread and wine upon the altar as "these gifts."

We offer them for your holy catholic Church,
watch over it, Lord, and guide it;
grant it peace and unity throughout the world.
We offer them for N. our Pope,
for N. our bishop,
and for all who hold and teach the catholic faith
that comes to us from the apostles.

We then pray to God for the church. “Catholic” here probably refers to doctri-
nal orthodoxy. The key note in the first sentence is “peace” in the biblical
sense; that is, the totality of all divine blessings, past, present and future.
Those whose special ministry it is to foster the peace and unity of the church
are then named.

Remember, Lord, your people,
especially those for whom we now pray, N. and N.

Remember all of us gathered here before you.
You know how firmly we believe in you
and dedicate ourselves to you.
We offer you this sacrifice of praise
for ourselves and those who are dear to us.
We pray to you, our living and true God,
for our well-being and redemption.

We next pray for the living. The first sentence does not refer to all persons
everywhere, but to all believers — all whose faith is known to God. The scope
is then narrowed to those present for this particular celebration.

In union with the whole Church
we honor Mary,
the ever-virgin mother
of Jesus Christ our Lord and God.
We honor Joseph, her husband,
the apostles and martyrs
Peter and Paul, Andrew, . . .
and all the saints.
May their merits and prayers
gain us your constant help and protection.

The spirit of the prayer is that we pray to God in communion with the whole
church, including Mary and the saints, whose memory we now honor.

We note that the eucharist celebrates not only communion with God but the
communion of the faithful among ourselves. It is then appropriate to name and
commemorate the faithful who already experience the glory of God and espe-
cially those who have given special witness.

Father, accept this offering
from your whole family.
Grant us your peace in this life,
save us from final damnation,
and count us among those you have chosen.

This prayer again names those who are praying the eucharistic prayer (your
whole family) and again states our desire for “your peace.”

Bless and approve our offering;
make it acceptable to you,
an offering in spirit and in truth.
Let it become for us
the body and blood of Jesus Christ,
your only Son, our Lord.

This is not an explicit consecratory epiclesis, as is found in the other eucharistic prayers. The Holy Spirit is not named.

The day before he suffered
he took bread in his sacred hands
and looking up to heaven,
to you, his almighty Father,
he gave you thanks and praise.
He broke the bread,
gave it to his disciples, and said:
Take this, all of you, and eat it:
this is my body which will be given up for you.

When supper was ended,
he took the cup.
Again he gave you thanks and praise,
gave the cup to his disciples, and said:
Take this, all of you, and drink from it:
this is the cup of my blood,
the blood of the new and everlasting covenant.
It will be shed for you and for all
so that sins may be forgiven.
Do this in memory of me.

Let us proclaim the mystery of faith:
    Christ has died,
    Christ is risen,
Christ will come again.

Father,
we celebrate the memory of Christ, your Son.

The Latin “Unde et memores” brings out more clearly the connection between the institution and what follows. It may be translated as “And so, Lord God, we celebrate the memory of Christ, your Son.”

We, your people and your ministers,
recall his passion,
his resurrection from the dead,
and his ascension into glory;
and from the many gifts you have given us
we offer to you, God of glory and majesty,
this holy and perfect sacrifice:
the bread of life
and the cup of eternal salvation.

This text, the anamnesis, states why the church is doing what it does (“in memory of me”), why it does it, and the object of its commemorative action. The eucharistic celebration is defined in this text. It also tells us who is carrying out the action: “we, your people and your ministers.” It expresses a clear
consciousness of the unity of the church. We not only “recall” but also “offer;” however, what we offer is not our own, but rather the gift of God.

Look with favor on these offerings and accept them as once you accepted the gifts of your servant Abel, the sacrifice of Abraham, our father in faith, and the bread and wine offered by your priest Melchisedech.

This is another prayer for the acceptance of our offering. God is asked to look upon our offering with graciousness and kindness. Three biblical models of sacrifices that were found acceptable are named.

Almighty God, we pray that your angel may take this sacrifice to your altar in heaven. Then, as we receive from this altar the sacred body and blood of your son, let us be filled with every grace and blessing.

In this prayer we continue to pray for the acceptance of our action; it also names the heavenly liturgy with which we are union.

Remember, Lord, those who have died and have gone before us marked with the sign of faith, especially those for whom we now pray, N. and N. May these, and all who sleep in Christ, find in your presence light, happiness, and peace.

The word “refrigerii” implies the traditional image of “refreshment” and is a stronger word than “happiness.”

For ourselves, too, we ask some share in the fellowship with John the Baptist, Stephen, Matthias, Barnabas, (Ignatius, Alexander, Marcellinus, Peter, Felicity, Perpetua, Agatha, Lucy, Agnes, Cecilia, Anastasia) and all the saints.

The members of the church who have lived before us are now remembered.

Though we are sinners, we trust in your mercy and love. Do not consider what we truly deserve, but grant us your forgiveness.

The second of these final commemorations is an intercession for ourselves, and especially for the presider and other ministers.

Through Christ our Lord you give us all these gifts.
You fill them with life and goodness,  
you bless them and make them holy.

This prayer commemorates the goodness of God; it sums up the generosity  
and magnanimity of God.

Through him, with him, in him,  
in the unity of the Holy Spirit,  
all glory and honor is yours,  
almighty Father,  
for ever and ever.  
Amen.

ORBIS LITURGICUS

Under the direction of Dom Cuthbert Johnson, OSB and Reverend Doctor Anthony Ward, SM, this is the first volume of the forthcoming series of a bio-bibliographical Directory of Liturgists from the year 1000 to the present day.

The following is the scheme for each entry:

A. Family name, first name
B. Professional address, telephone and fax number
C. Professional posts, qualifications, honours, etc.
D. Editorships, membership of editorial committees, scholarly societies
E. Main fields of interest
F. Publications in chronological order of appearance
G. Publications in the press
H. Publications in preparation

Material should be drafted in English, French, Italian, Spanish, or German, must be at least typewritten, and should, if possible, be sent both in hard copy and on computer disk (IBM compatible, disk 5 1/4" or 3 1/2", WordPerfect/other compatible program or ASCII). Priority will be given to those entries submitted on disk. Material cannot be returned. Entries at present outstanding must be sent to arrive no later than September 15, 1991 (in time for publication in early 1992) to:

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00193 ROMA, ITALIA (Tel. 6540841; Fax 6892945)

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Eucharistic Prayer 2

This eucharistic prayer has its own preface, though it may be replaced by other prefaces.

Father, it is our duty and our salvation, always and everywhere to give you thanks through your beloved Son, Jesus Christ.

He is the Word through whom you made the universe, the Savior you sent to redeem us. By the power of the Holy Spirit he took flesh and was born of the Virgin Mary.

In other words Jesus took flesh by the Holy Spirit and was born of the Virgin Mary.

For our sake he opened his arms on the cross; he put an end to death and revealed the resurrection. In this he fulfilled your will and won for you a holy people.

This prayer is based on the ancient text of Hippolytus and may read: “To accomplish your will and gain for you a holy people, he stretched out his arms on the cross, that he might break the chains of death and make known the resurrection.”

And so we join the angels and the saints in proclaiming your glory as we sing: (Holy, holy,)

Jesus Christ is the mediator of salvation, and here is named Word, Savior, Son, and the incarnate one. He did his Father’s will, which led to the cross. However, he was victorious over death, manifested the resurrection and saved the people who believe in him.

Lord, you are holy indeed, the fountain of all holiness.

Sanctification is a process of self-communication on the part of God.

Let your Spirit come upon these gifts to make them holy, so that they may become for us the body and blood of our Lord, Jesus Christ.

The idea of the epiclesis is more direct: “Send down your Spirit upon these gifts to make them holy . . .” The Latin texts refers to the “dew” of the Holy Spirit, like “the word that goes forth from God’s mouth.” It is an efficacious out-pouring of God’s Spirit, which carries out the action of sanctification.
Before he was given up to death,  
a death he freely accepted,  
he took bread and gave you thanks.  
He broke the bread,  
gave it to his disciples, and said:  

Take this, all of you, and eat it:  
this is my body which will be given up for you.

When supper was ended, he took the cup.  
Again he gave you thanks and praise,  
gave the cup to his disciples, and said:  

Take this, all of you, and drink from it:  
this is the cup of my blood,  
the blood of the new and everlasting covenant.  
It will be shed for you and for all  
so that sins may be forgiven.

Do this in memory of me.

Praise to you, Lord Jesus!  
firstborn from the dead.

        Dying you destroyed our death,  
        rising you restored our life.  
        Lord Jesus, come in glory.

In memory of his death and resurrection,  
we offer you, Father, this life-giving bread,  
this saving cup.  
We thank you for counting us worthy  
to stand in your presence and serve you.  
May all of us who share in the body and blood of Christ  
be brought together in unity by the Holy Spirit.

As in Eucharistic Prayer I, the current English translation does not make as clear  
the connection between the institution and what follows. A more direct translation  
may be: “Remembering therefore his death and resurrection, we offer you,  
Lord, this life-giving bread, this saving cup . . . We pray that we who share in the  
body and blood of Christ may be gathered into one by the Holy Spirit.”

This simple anamnesis recalls only Christ’s death and resurrection and moves  
immediately into the offering statement. We name ourselves or those chosen  
by God ("counted worthy"); we are thereby made capable of carrying out the  
eucharistic action.

The second epiclesis is closely connected with the anamnesis. Three actions  
are mentioned: the sharing of holy communion by the participants in this cele-  
bration (and by believers throughout the whole world); the sanctifying action of  
the Holy Spirit; and the unity of the church.

        Lord, remember your Church throughout the world;  
        make us grow in love,  
        together with N. our Pope,  
        N. our bishop, and all the clergy.
The following translation better reflects the Latin original: “Lord, remember your church throughout the world: perfect us in love, together with N. our Pope, N. our Bishop, and all whom you call to your service.”

The first intercession is for the church.

Remember our brothers and sisters
who have gone to their rest
in the hope of rising again;
bring them and all the departed
into the light of your presence.

The second intercession is for the departed. The following adds some important nuances to the intent of the prayer: “the sure hope of rising again;” and “bring . . . all who have died in your mercy into the light of your presence.”

Have mercy on us all;
make us worthy to share eternal life
with Mary, the virgin Mother of God,
with the apostles, and with all the saints
who have done your will throughout the ages.

May we praise you in union with them,
and give you glory
through your Son, Jesus Christ.

This intercession is for the living, but it incorporates a commemoration of Mary and of the apostles and other saints. It concludes with a statement of our desire to join the saints in worship in the very presence of God.

Through him, with him, in him,
in the unity of the Holy Spirit,
all glory and honor is yours,
almighty Father,
for ever and ever.
Amen.
Father, you are holy indeed,
[The Latin has “Lord” here.]
and all creation rightly gives you praise.
All life, all holiness comes from you
through your Son, Jesus Christ our Lord,
by the working of the Holy Spirit.
From age to age you gather a people to yourself,
so that from east to west
a perfect offering may be made
to the glory of your name.

This eucharistic prayer begins by praising God. It goes on to describe salvation as the work of all three persons of the trinity. The divine gifts that are mentioned are “life” and “holiness.” The context is that of the church: “a people;” the church is viewed as a liturgical assembly in which God is present. The section also contains an allusion to Malachi 1:11 “... from the rising of the sun to its setting . . .” to indicate that the worship of God is to be universal.

And so, Father, we bring you these gifts.
We ask you to make them holy
by the power of your Spirit,
that they may become the body and blood
of your Son, our Lord Jesus Christ,
at whose command we celebrate this eucharist.

The first epiclesis refers to the gifts which have already been presented, and asks God through the Holy Spirit to sanctify them. This text concludes by referring to Christ’s command to celebrate the eucharist, the command which will be explicitly quoted following the institution narrative.

The following alternative translation is more faithful to the Latin original: “And so, Lord God, we humbly pray: by the power of your Spirit sanctify these gifts which we have brought before you . . .”

On the night he was betrayed,
[or: on the night he was handed over to death]
he took bread and gave you thanks and praise.
He broke the bread, gave it to his disciples, and said:

Take this, all of you, and eat it:
this is my body which will be given up for you.

When supper was ended, he took the cup.
Again he gave you thanks and praise,
gave the cup to his disciples, and said:

Take this, all of you, and drink from it:
this is the cup of my blood,
the blood of the new and everlasting covenant.
It will be shed for you and for all
so that sins may be forgiven.

Do this in memory of me.
We are faithful, Lord, to your command:
   When we eat this bread and drink this cup,
   we proclaim your death, Lord Jesus,
   until you come in glory.

Father, calling to mind
   the death your Son endured for our salvation,
   his glorious resurrection and ascension into heaven,
   and ready to greet him when he comes again,
we offer you in thanksgiving
   this holy and living sacrifice.

This anamnesis states the nature, meaning, and value of the eucharistic action
that is being carried out and thereby deepens our understanding of what we
are doing. It calls for intentional activity on our part: “calling to mind.” This
eucharistic prayer also refers to the future: “looking forward to the day of his
return.” Finally, it repeats the note of thanksgiving.

Look with favor on your Church’s offering,
and see the Victim
   whose death has reconciled us to yourself.

The following translation gives us a better reflection of the construction of the
Latin text: “Look with favor on the offering of your Church, and see in it the
sacrifice by which you reconciled us to yourself.”

Grant that we,
   who are nourished by his body and blood,
   may be filled with his Holy Spirit,
   and become one body, one spirit in Christ.

In this eucharistic prayer, the epiclesis for the communicants is joined with the
prayer for the acceptance of the sacrifice. Holy communion is referred to as
“nourishment”, and we ask God to fill us with the Holy Spirit in order to come to
and be maintained in unity.

May he make us an everlasting gift to you
   and enable us to share
   in the inheritance of your saints,
   with Mary, the virgin Mother of God;
   with the apostles, the martyrs,
   (Saint N.) and all your saints,
   on whose constant intercession we rely for help.

The first part of this prayer is unusual in that the gift of God that is referred to
is not the eucharist but our lives: the lives of those transformed by celebrating
the eucharist. This leads to a commemoration of the church in heaven.

   Lord, may this sacrifice,
   which has made our peace with you,
   advance the peace and salvation of all the world.

The eucharist and the eucharistic life of Christians benefit the whole world; the
eucharist is a sacrament of reconciliation.

   Strengthen in faith and love
   your pilgrim Church on earth;
   your servant, Pope N., our bishop N.,
and all the bishops,
with the clergy and the entire people
your Son has gained for you.

We ask that the church as a whole may be strengthened. It is described as a “pilgrim church” an image that was important at the Second Vatican Council. The church is described in terms of its ordained ministers and “entire people.”

Father, hear the prayers of the family
you have gathered here before you.
In mercy and love
unite all your children wherever they may be.

After the intercession for the church as a whole, there is a prayer for the assembly that is celebrating; it is a family, and one gathered by God. The following nuances bring out the imagery suggested by the Didache: “. . . and unite to yourself all your children now scattered over the face of the earth.”

Welcome into your kingdom
our departed brothers and sisters,
and all who have left this world in your friendship.
We hope to enjoy for ever the vision of your glory,
through Christ our Lord,
from whom all good things come.

The final intercession is for the dead, and to it is joined a statement of our hope to one day worship in the presence of God.

Through him, with him, in him,
in the unity of the Holy Spirit,
all glory and honor is yours,
almighty Father,
forever and ever.
Amen.
The preface of the fourth eucharistic prayer is never to be replaced by another preface; it is an integral part of the whole prayer.

Father in heaven,
it is right that we should give you thanks and glory:
you alone are God, living and true.

The Latin brings out the connection between the dialogue ("It is right to give him thanks and praise") and the first words of the preface: "Father most holy, it is right for us to give you thanks, it is right to give you glory."

This eucharistic prayer uses the biblical title "Father most holy" four times; this image comes from the gospel according to John (17: 11). God is described as one, living, and true.

Through all eternity you live in unapproachable light.
Source of life and goodness, you have created all things,
to fill your creatures with every blessing
and lead all men to the joyful vision of your light.

A more poetic translation reads: "Before time began and for all eternity you dwell in unapproachable light. Source of life and goodness, you have created all things, that they may abound with every blessing and rejoice in the radi­ance of your light."

God's goodness is celebrated in terms of the creation of the universe and the creation of all life.

Countless hosts of angels stand before you to do your will;
they look upon your splendor
and praise you, night and day.

United with them,
and in the name of every creature under heaven,
we too praise your glory as we sing: (Holy, holy,)

Father, we acknowledge your greatness:
all your actions show your wisdom and love.

The following version uses more biblical language: "Father most holy, we proclaim your greatness: all your works show forth your wisdom and love."

The prayer continues by telling the story of God's great goodness, wisdom and love in the course of salvation history; we "proclaim" this story, and thereby proclaim God's greatness.

You formed man in your own likeness
and set him over the whole world
to serve you, his creator,
and to rule over all creatures.

The human being is the image of God; hence we praise God for the immense dignity conferred on humankind. The alternative translation (below) describes us as having stewardship over the rest of creation, not dominion.
Even when he disobeyed you and lost your friendship you did not abandon him to the power of death, but helped all men to seek and find you. Again and again you offered a covenant to man, and through the prophets taught him to hope for salvation.

We next proclaim God's patience and great love in the face of human sinfulness. God never gives up on us, but always seeks us out. The story of salvation recounted in the Hebrew Scriptures is referred to in terms of the "covenant" and "the prophets."

The following better communicates the intention of the original: "You formed man and woman in your own likeness and entrusted the whole world to their care, so that in serving only you, their Creator, they might have dominion over every creature. Even when they disobeyed you and lost your friendship, you did not abandon them to the power of death, but extended your hand in mercy, that all who search for you might find you. Again and again you offered humankind a covenant and through the prophets implanted the hope of salvation."

Father, you so loved the world that in the fullness of time you sent your only Son to be our Savior. He was conceived through the power of the Holy Spirit, and born of the Virgin Mary, a man like us in all things but sin.

The work of salvation culminates in the life and work of Jesus; John 3: 16 and Galatians 4: 4 are referred to. He is "your only Son" and "our Savior."

To the poor he proclaimed the good news of salvation, to prisoners, freedom, and to those in sorrow, joy. In fulfillment of your will he gave himself up to death; but by rising from the dead, he destroyed death and restored life.

And that we might live no longer for ourselves but for him, he sent the Holy Spirit from you, Father, as his first gift to those who believe, to complete his work on earth and bring us the fullness of grace.

The work of Christ is described in three phases: his ministry, his paschal mystery, and his gift of the Holy Spirit. This well-rounded description of God's plan and Christ's work is important for its reference to the Spirit.

Father, may this Holy Spirit sanctify these offerings. Let them become the body and blood of Jesus Christ our Lord as we celebrate the great mystery which he left us as an everlasting covenant.
The designation of the Spirit as sanctifier leads immediately to the first epiclesis in which we ask God to send this Spirit to sanctify the gifts of bread and wine.

He always loved those who were his own in the world.
When the time came
for him to be glorified by you, his heavenly Father,
he showed the depth of his love.

The following uses more biblical language and brings out the finality of Jesus' love: "When the hour had come for him to be glorified by you, Father most holy, having loved his own who were in the world, he loved them to the end."

This eucharistic prayer has a unique introduction to the account of the institution; it is taken from John 13: 1 and John 17: 1; God is again called "Father most holy." This section builds upon the last words of the first epiclesis: "as we celebrate the great mystery which he left us as an everlasting covenant."

While they were at supper,
he took bread, said the blessing, broke the bread,
and gave it to his disciples, saying:

Take this, all of you, and eat it:
this is my body which will be given up for you.

In the same way, he took the cup, filled with wine.
He gave you thanks,
and giving the cup to his disciples, said:

Take this, all of you, and drink from it:
this is the cup of my blood,
the blood of the new and everlasting covenant.
It will be shed for you and for all
so that sins may be forgiven.

Do this in memory of me.

Christ is Lord of all ages!

Lord, by your cross and resurrection
you have set us free.
You are the Savior of the world.

Father, we now celebrate
this memorial of our redemption.
We recall Christ's death, his descent among the dead,
his resurrection, and his ascension to your right hand;
and, looking forward to his coming in glory,
we offer you his body and blood,
the acceptable sacrifice
which brings salvation to the whole world.

The anamnesis and offering together contain a string of theologically profound verbs: celebrate, recall, proclaim, and offer. We unite ourself with Christ in celebrating the sacramental memorial of his death and resurrection. We sacramentally celebrate the sacrifice of Christ which is a saving grace for the whole world.

Lord, look upon this sacrifice
which you have given to your Church:
and by your Holy Spirit,
gather all who share this one bread and one cup
into the one body of Christ, a living sacrifice of praise.

The following translation brings out in a clearer way the agency of God by reminding us that the sacrifice we offer is prepared by God: “Lord, look upon the sacrifice which you yourself have prepared for your Church; and by your Holy Spirit gather all who share this one bread and one cup into one body, a living sacrifice in Christ, to the praise and glory of your name.”

The church is one body of those who share in holy communion; it lives out the paschal mystery of Jesus Christ; and it does so to give glory to God.

Lord, remember those
for whom we offer this sacrifice,
especially N. our Pope,
N. our bishop, and bishops and clergy everywhere.

Remember those who take part in this offering,
those here present and all your people,
and all who seek you with a sincere heart.

Remember those who have died in the peace of Christ
and all the dead whose faith is known to you alone.

These are intercessions for the church, for the living and for the dead.

Father, in your mercy grant also to us, your children,
to enter into our heavenly inheritance
in the company of the Virgin Mary,
the Mother of God,
and your apostles and saints.

We look forward to joining Mary and the saints in the presence of God.

Then, in your kingdom,
freed from the corruption of sin and death,
we shall sing your glory with every creature
through Christ our Lord,
through whom you give us everything that is good.

We look forward to worshiping God, after having been liberated through death and passage into new life.

Through him, with him, in him,
in the unity of the Holy Spirit,
all glory and honor is yours,
almighty Father,
for ever and ever.
Amen.
The Action of the Eucharist

The Last Supper: An examination of the four accounts of the institution of the eucharist contained in 1 Corinthians 11:23-26; Matthew 26:26-29; Mark 14:22-25; and Luke 22:15-20, reveals seven acts which take place in two rites: one for the bread and one for the cup.

Jesus (1) took bread, (2) gave thanks, (3) broke it, and (4) gave it to his disciples. In the same way he (5) took the cup, (6) gave thanks, and (7) gave the cup to the disciples.

The Last Supper obviously took place within the context of a meal at Passover time. The actions of taking the bread, giving thanks, breaking it and giving it (actions 1 to 4) took place at the beginning of the Meal, while the actions surrounding the cup (5 to 7) happened after the Meal.

Two Rites into One: Very early in the life of the Church, as Christianity moved out of the Jewish culture and into the Greek culture of the Roman empire, the Meal was dropped from the celebration of the eucharist. As this happened the two rites, one for the bread and one for the cup, evolved into one rite for both the bread and cup. It is these four basic elements or actions of Christ which form the basis of the liturgy of eucharist.

Development of the Liturgy of the Eucharist: Over the centuries these four elements have expanded into what we now call the preparation of the gifts; the eucharistic prayer; the fraction rite or breaking of the bread; and the communion rite. It is these four actions that the liturgical reform of Vatican Council II wished to emphasize in a way that would make their meaning obvious.

Preparation of Gifts

A Tradition of Sharing: A constant tradition witnessed through history is that Christians brought food and money to the community at the time of the celebration of the eucharist. We see this practice reflected in the Acts of the Apostles and Paul's Letters to the Corinthians, the Apology of Justin Martyr, the Apostolic Tradition of Hippolytus. Some of the bread and wine was used for the actual celebration of the eucharist, but the emphasis was on the sharing with the poor. It was clear in the mind of the disciples of Jesus that sharing with the poor was an attitude that flowed from discipleship and from the nature of the eucharist and their understanding of it.

Flows from Baptism: The eucharist today must also reflect this baptismal commitment to sharing with others, especially those in need. Baptism, the sacrament of union with the body of Christ, and eucharist, the sacrament expressing our unity are not just theological ideas, but practical ways of living our lives and expressing our faith in action. It is for this reason that the General Instruction of the Roman Missal presumes that a procession of gifts is a natural occurrence.

At the beginning of the liturgy of the eucharist, the gifts which will become Christ's body and blood, are brought to the altar. First the altar, the Lord's table, which is the center of the whole eucharistic liturgy, is prepared . . .
gifts are then brought forward. It is desirable for the faithful to present the bread and wine, which are accepted by the priest or deacon at a convenient place. The gifts are placed on the altar. Even though the faithful no longer, as in the past, bring the bread and wine for the liturgy from their homes, the rite of carrying up the gifts retains the same spiritual value and meaning. This is also the time to receive money or gifts for the church or the poor brought by the faithful or collected at Mass. These are to be put in a suitable place but not on the altar. [GIRM, no. 49]

Our Sharing: Number 100 of the General Instruction encourages us to see the connection between our sharing with the Church and the poor and our involvement in the liturgy when it says: “it is fitting for the faithful's participation to be expressed by their presenting both the bread and wine for the celebration of the eucharist and other gifts to meet the needs of the church and of the poor.” The liturgy, then, is not just the question of doing the right thing at the right time, it is a question of our attitude and life being reflected in what we do at the eucharist. There must be a conscious attitude on our part: in recognizing all that God has done for and given to us, we come to share those blessings with others.

The Eucharistic Prayer

Said the Blessing: Jesus said the blessing. What blessing? Jesus said the Jewish prayer of thanksgiving called the Birkat-Ha-Mazon. We will recognize in this prayer the roots of the eucharistic prayer which praised God, gave thanks for the mighty deeds that God had worked through history, as well as for the nourishment set on the table, and then petitioned for mercy, unity and God's favour both now and in the future, for those present and for all others. As pointed out in another article, listing God's mighty actions was also a way of proclaiming not to God, but to all present what God had done.

The Prayer of Thanksgiving: The Jewish prayer of thanksgiving or blessing was recited by the head of the household and invoked the three great themes of Judaism: creation, revelation and redemption. In the same way, the presider prays on behalf of all assembled to thank God for the gifts of creation, revelation, and salvation and through Jesus Christ. In the words of the General Instruction:

Now the center and summit of the entire celebration begins: the eucharistic prayer, a prayer of thanksgiving and sanctification. The priest invites the people to lift up their hearts to the Lord in prayer and thanks; he unites them with himself in the prayer he addresses in their name to the Father through Jesus Christ. The meaning of the prayer is that the entire congregation joins itself to Christ in acknowledging the great things God has done and in offering the sacrifice. [GIRM, no. 54]

The Prayer of the Church: It is this prayer that gives the eucharist its name, which means, that essentially we recognize the gift of our salvation in Christ and therefore gather as a community under the presidency of the church's minister to give thanks to God. The fact that the prayer is proclaimed by one for all does not diminish the fact that it is the prayer of the church. The sung acclamations which form part of the "great prayer" help us to realize that it is the prayer of all. We proclaim our openness and readiness to praise God in the preface dialogue; we praise God in the hymn of the angels: "Holy, holy, holy Lord..."; we proclaim the mystery of our faith: "Christ has died..."; and finally we give our assent and profess our faith in the "Amen," as we say "I believe," "I agree with all that has been proclaimed."
The Memorial of Jesus: The eucharist is the memorial of Jesus, not only in an intellectual way, but also in a very practical way. As Jesus gave his life so are we willing to give our life in obedience and service to the Father of Jesus so that, as the life and obedience of Jesus were transformed in the resurrection, so we believe the gift of our obedient service will be transformed in ways that we cannot know or anticipate. The eucharist is for us a profession of our faith in the providence of God. Our lives as individuals may seem insignificant to us at times, but united with all members of the Church, with all who have gathered to lay down their lives, it becomes a gift to be used by the God of all power for the building up of the body of Christ. It is the power of the Spirit that gives us the courage to make this sacrifice in union with the sacrifice of praise Jesus offered, and it is the power of the Spirit that guides all things, even when we are not sure where the events of this world are going to lead us. This forms a part of that eschatological element of the eucharist. A complicated way of saying that the eucharist looks forward to the coming of the Kingdom of God in its fulness. In other words, we make an act of faith that God is reigning over all, and the will of God will be accomplished.

Transformation: When we give thanks and praise to God we are transformed by the very act of thanking and praising God. We recognize that it is God, through the Holy Spirit, who transforms both the bread and wine into the Body and Blood of Jesus and transforms the community into the body of Christ. Thus the bread and wine are not the only elements that undergo a change. We often forget that the prayer asks God to change us. We must let ourselves be changed by God into the image of the Son.

The Breaking of Bread or the Fraction Rite

The One Bread: The unleaven bread or mazoth which Jesus used at the Last Supper were large, flat pieces of bread. The breaking and sharing of this bread symbolized the friendship and unity of all gathered at table. The Semitic mind realized that only friends were invited to share at table and in the intimacy of the family gathering. To break off a piece of bread and give it to another meant that what I have, I share with others. So the breaking of the bread at the eucharist carries the same symbolism. There is one additional meaning: the breaking of the bread symbolizes for us the death of Jesus in order to give life to others. This meaning is amplified as we sing of the “Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world . . .”

Symbolism: In order to maintain and heighten our awareness of this third action of Christ at the institution of the eucharist, the General Instruction asks that:

Accordingly, even though unleavened and baked in the traditional shape, the eucharistic bread, should be made in such a way that in a Mass with a congregation the priest is able actually to break the host into parts and distribute them to some of the faithful . . . . The action of the breaking of the bread, the simple term for the eucharist in apostolic times, will more clearly bring out the force and meaning of the sign of the unity of all in the one bread and of their charity, since the one bread is being distributed among the members of one family. [GIRM, no. 283]

This rite is not simply functional, but a sign that in sharing in the one bread of life which is Christ we who are many are made one body (see 1 Cor. 10:17). [GIRM, no. 56c]
Communion Rite

The Gift of God: God is never outdone in giving or in generosity. Although we assemble to give thanks for the gifts of life (creation), the Word (revelation), and Jesus (salvation), which God has already given us; nevertheless the gifts of God are not exhausted. God accepts our praise, thanksgiving and the gifts of bread and wine and transforms us and them into the body of the Son, his only beloved Son. Thus we proceed (in procession) to the altar of God to share in the receiving of the source of love and life: Jesus Christ.

Prime Action: The primary action of the communion rite flows from the nature of the symbols used in the eucharist – the bread and wine. The act of communion is eating and drinking with the risen Christ and the community of believers. There are three dimensions of our eating and drinking in communion with the body of Christ. The communion feast has an eschatological connotation. The Hebrew scriptures and some of the parables of Jesus speak of the kingdom of God in terms of a banquet. The sharing of the eucharist is a joyous event of celebrating the love of God, the presence of Jesus and the fellowship and unity of the believing community. The bread and wine speak of the nourishment that we receive. Strengthened by the body and blood of the Lord, we can go forward to be disciples and give witness to the presence of Jesus in our midst.

The Act of Receiving: Communion is not just Christ given or shared; it is the action of receiving and sharing Christ. Thus the eucharist is an action: it involves our participation, movement, receiving, and sharing with God and others as God has shared with us. Receiving Christ in the act of communion involves our attitudes, motivations, and faith which cause us to live as Christians. In other words we put on the mind of Christ Jesus to do what Christ did. This is not passive – it is the active giving and sharing of our life in response to the sharing of Christ. We must now share our life, that life which is not ours in the first place, but already a gift that belongs to God.

Receiving Not Taking: Communion then is the act of receiving. Is it to persevere this action of receiving that the Church mandates the laity to distribute Communion when there is a shortage of sacred ministers, or other pastoral ministry takes them away from the celebration. The eucharist is never taken, it is received.

Sharing from the One Bread: The General Instruction following the mandate of the Second Vatican Council, and echoing the instruction of the Council of Trent, states:

> It is most desirable that the faithful receive the Lord's body from hosts consecrated at the same Mass and, in the instances when it is permitted, they share in the chalice. Then even through the signs communion will stand out more clearly as a sharing in the sacrifice actually being celebrated. [GIRM, no. 56h]

A Balance of Views: Is the eucharist the action of God or the action of the Church? Is the eucharist the praise of the Church ascending to God through Son in the Holy Spirit, or is it Christ descending to our altars? Hopefully from our discussion we can see elements of both. Throughout various periods in history, one element may be given precedence over the other. The idea is to remember both. Liturgy is both the work of God and human beings. Liturgy is both our presence to God and Christ's presence to us, both in the assembly itself and in the action of celebration. Like incense, let our prayers and praise ascend into your sight, O Lord. Let us be your Christ in this world.

58
Posture During the Eucharistic Prayer

**General Instruction:** Concerning the posture of the congregation during the eucharistic prayer, the *General Instruction of the Roman Missal* sets down the following norms.

**Uniformity:** The uniformity of the assembly is the main concern of the *Roman Instruction* in the section entitled Movements and Postures. "The uniformity in standing, kneeling, or sitting to be observed by all taking part is a sign of the community and the unity of the assembly, it both expresses and fosters the spiritual attitude of those taking part" [GIRM, no. 20]. So important is the uniformity that it is stressed again in number 21 and in several of the replies of the Sacred Congregation for Divine Worship, as printed in the footnotes of the *Instruction* [page 12 of the CCCB edition]. In reply 2 [R2] the Congregation states that uniformity in posture in the assembly is a manifestation of the community's unity in faith and worship. For the sake of uniformity, the deacon, priest or another minister may give directions to the people [GIRM, 21]

**Conference of Bishops:** The conference of bishops is able to adapt the actions and postures described in the Order of the Roman Mass to the customs of the people. Their adaptations are to help bring out the meaning and character of each part of the celebration [GIRM, 21].

**Provisions:** If no directions have been made, then the following should apply: "at every Mass the people should stand . . . from the prayer over the gifts to the end of the Mass, except at the places indicated later in this paragraph . . . They should kneel at the consecration unless prevented by lack of space, the number of people present, or some other good reason [GIRM, no. 21].

**Reasons:** Some of the reasons for not kneeling during the consecration are to persevere the unity of and to respect the whole eucharistic prayer, from the preface dialogue to the Great Amen; to express the unity between the priest and the people of God and to demonstrate in a more evident manner that the anaphora is the prayer of the whole Church and not just the prayer of the priest; to avoid the distraction and disruption by the movement of kneeling and standing during the proclamation of the solemn prayer; to reflect the ancient practice of the Church that Catholics do not kneel on the Day of the Resurrec-

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1 See *Reconsideration of Postures for the Laity at the Eucharist*, Western Liturgical Conference, revised, January 1986. Available from the Western Liturgical Conference, 1 Daffodil Drive, Moose Jaw, SK S6J 1H4

2 It should be pointed out that the Roman custom is to remain standing throughout the eucharistic prayer. This more ancient tradition has been preserved mainly due to the lack of seats and kneelers in Roman basilicas.
tion, but stand as a sign of respect and a sign of our faith that Jesus the Lord has risen from the dead and we too have been raised up out of our sins; and to allow greater visibility in larger church buildings.

Postures that Speak: In another response the Congregation for Divine Worship amplifies the provision that adaptation should “correspond to the meaning and character of each part of the celebration” by stating that:

The people often give the impression immediately after the Sanctus and even more after the consecration by their diverse postures that they are unmindful of being participants in the Church’s liturgy, which is the supreme action of a community and not a time for individuals to isolate themselves in acts of private devotion [Notitiae 14 (1978) 300-301, no. 1].

Standing: Kneeling usually is an act of adoration and individual piety, but the eucharistic prayer is the action of the Church offering the prayer and sacrifice of praise to God. At this point of the Liturgy the Church is proclaiming its faith in God’s goodness, and offering the prayer and sacrifice of praise. We stand for the proclamation of the Gospel; should we not also stand for the proclamation of God’s mighty deeds in the eucharistic prayer? During the Liturgy we stand when in communal prayer. Should we not stand at this central and most important prayer of the Church? Standing is a sign of our activity; we are doing something. Kneeling is a sign of penitence or passivity and receptivity; and while these are appropriate religious practices and attitudes, the eucharistic prayer is not the time for these attitudes; the Church is involved in the action of offering to God.

Reverence: Standing is a sign of respect. We stand when someone important enters the room. Where the people do not kneel, “a deep bow and a respectful bearing are signs of the reverence and adoration to be shown at the time of the consecration and communion” [Notitiae 14 (1978) 302-303, no. 4].

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3 See Canon 20 of the Council of Nicaea (325 A.D.). The Council also stated that standing throughout the eucharistic prayer would provide uniformity of posture of public prayer throughout the whole Church, East and West.
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This is a collection of articles on liturgy by the author that have appeared in the last twenty-five years with updating and rewriting of introductions and conclusions. Topics include: priesthood in baptism and ordination; sources and structure of the eucharistic prayer; liturgy of reconciliation; history and eschatology in the primitive Pasch; the feast of all saints; the liturgical year: pattern of proclamation. The historical study of Christian worship demonstrates that each generation of believers has refashioned the practices of the past to express its own faith. Thomas Talley is known for his research and clarity of thought. All students of liturgy will profit from the author's scholarship.


In the midst of life we encounter some evil and suffering. This book by a minister and professor at the Toronto School of Theology, member of the U. N. Human Rights Commission, MP, and author offers reflections on "If suffering is the wages of sin, why are some people paid overtime?"


Here are the outstanding entries of the third annual Best Sermons Competition, representing a cross section of mostly Protestant religious affiliations. Sermons are divided into themes: evangelistic; expository; doctrinal/theological; ethical; pastoral; and devotional. Pastors will enjoy seeing what others say. A good stimulus for homily ideas.

Sunday Book of Readings Adapted For Children, Year A (1990, Novalis, Canada, 6255 Hutchison St, Montreal, QC H2V 4C7; in USA by Treehaus Communications, Inc., P.O. Box 249, Loveland, OH 45140): ISBN 0-929496-38-8, hard, $59.95 CDN

A true Lectionary (hardbound in blue with gold stamping) with scripture readings based on the official lectionary and adapted for children in compliance with the Directory for Masses with Children. Forewords by Cardinal Basil Hume, OSB, Archbishop James M. Hayes, Carroll Stuhlmueller, CP, and Christiane Brusselians. Each Sunday and Solemnity contains the First Reading, short Response, Gospel Acclamation and Gospel. The language of the Reading has been adapted to the vocabulary of the child without "watering down" the Word of God. Highly recommended.

Lectionary for Masses with Children Year B (1990, Twenty-Third Publications, 185 Willow St., P.O. Box 180, Mystic, CT 06355): ISBN 0-89622-435-x, paper cover, 216 pp, $19.95 US

A paperback cuts down the cost but does not provide a suitable book for liturgical use. This volume contains two readings
for each Sunday. There is a preparation for each reading, usually divided into voices, which seeks to focus the attention of children and parents on some aspect of the reading. The texts have been edited in places, but not adapted. A useful resource.


This volume contains 28 prayer services for various occasions and is intended for grade 2-6 students. Designed primarily for school use it may be useful for home prayer celebrations. The prayer services are short and employ visual, listening and activity components.


A timely collection of ten authors on the restored order of initiation of children, which addressed the catechetical, liturgical and pastoral questions. The main theme of the book deals with those confirmed as children and the growing awareness for ritually marking rites of passage, maturity or ministry for teens. Excellent reading!


As the title suggests this is a compendium of some of the leaders of the liturgical movement mostly in Europe and the United States. In addition to a short note on the liturgical "great", the book opens with a chronology of events from 1833 to 1989. A good review for students and a great introduction for beginners! This volume is the who's who in the liturgical renewal.


This is not another preparation book for couples planning marriage, but a book to teach and encourage couples to pray together, by using texts from the wedding ritual. This book may provide that spiritual preparation that pastors wish for every couple.


The format for each day includes a story from the scripture reading, followed by an application and a prayer. Reflections focus on the theme: when to say NO and when to say YES when people ask for help.


An apt topic for the year that celebrates the one hundredth anniversary of Rerum Novarum. The author is a Missionary of Africa who now teaches at Washington (DC) Theological Union. The booklet places the Church's social teaching in a liturgical context and includes a reflection on one of the scripture readings of the day, a quotation from one of the encyclicals, and a suggested application.


Subtitled, "Meditations on the Human Condition and the Desperate Passion of Jesus," this book combines scripture, poetry and a commentary on contemporary implications of Jesus' words. It is recommended as a faith-filled reflection and challenge to complete the task of Jesus.

A Way of the Cross for Religion Teachers by Gwen Costello ISBN

These booklets offer reflections that relate the passion of Christ to contemporary situations of different interest groups: for teachers and mothers.


So often we recite the words of the Creed, yet how often do we reflect on their meaning. This book offers reflections on the Creed to open their meaning to contemporary individuals. This is especially appropriate for the Lenten season and offers simple language for youth, those in the RCIA and long time Christians.


Fourteen articles selected as the best from the Pastoral Music Magazine. Contributors include Mark Searle, James B. Dunning, Robert J. Kennedy, David N. Power, Eileen Burke-Sullivan and others. This collection will help liturgists gain insight into the meanings of the rites and the liturgical seasons. The third section offers invaluable assistance to musicians to understand the music that fits the rites and suggestions.

The Three Days to Save by Gabe Huck (1990, Liturgy Training Publications, 1800 North Hermitage Ave., Chicago, IL 60622-1101): paper folder, two colours, 20# stock, $10 US for each package of 100.

This is a handout to be used by the parish to promote attendance at the liturgies of the Easter Triduum. It includes a brief catechesis on the importance of each day in the life of the Church. The folder is 8 1/2 by 11 inches, with the last half page blank so that each parish may print its own schedule.

COURSES IN PASTORAL LITURGY

Good courses in liturgy are being offered in North America. Some of these are given during the summer, some during the school year, and some in shorter institutes. Further information may be obtained by writing to the following:

School of Theology
St. John’s University
Collegeville, MN 56321

Program of Liturgical Studies
Department of Theology
University of Notre Dame
Notre Dame, IN 46556

The Aquinas Institute
3642 Lindell Boulevard
St. Louis, MO 63108

The Center for Pastoral Liturgy
The Catholic University of America
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