

Catholic

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THE LITURGY OF THE EUCHARIST

From the procession of the gifts to the concluding rites, God's people, enriched by God's Word, enter into holy Communion.

by William H. Shannon



CNS PHOTO/DAVE GREENHAW, EASTERN OKLAHOMA CATHOLIC

We celebrate the wondrous deeds of God on behalf of people in every celebration of the Liturgy of the Eucharist. Yet our frequent participation in the Mass can easily blunt our appreciation of all that the Liturgy of the Eucharist involves. For the purpose of discussion I want to speak of 1) the preparation (of altar, gifts, and people), 2) the eucharistic prayer, and 3) Communion.

We'll start with preparation. Originally the preparation ceremony was very simple and informal. Gifts, bread, and wine (as well as offerings for the poor) were brought to the priest-presider. He would say a prayer over them and then begin the eucharistic prayer.

This preparatory part of the eucharistic liturgy was restored to its primitive simplicity at the Second Vatican Council. It begins with preparing the altar. Up to this point the altar has been bare. During the Liturgy of the Word our attention has been directed elsewhere: to the lectern for the Scripture readings in which we hear the Word of God and the homily that breaks open that Word.

The homily is followed by the intercessions and the Creed. These having been completed, the book is brought to the altar by the server and the gifts (bread and wine and the offerings for the poor) are brought from the midst of the congregation and presented to the presider. Music may accompany the procession of the gifts. Having received the gifts, the presider says a prayer over them, asking God to receive these gifts and to bless the people from whom they come.

THE EUCHARISTIC PRAYER: GOD'S SAVING LOVE

Preface. The word *preface* has the usual meaning of introduction only in a secondary sense; namely, that it comes at the beginning of the eucharistic prayer. Its fundamental meaning makes clear to the presiding priest that he must do more than recite the eucharistic prayer. He must proclaim it in a voice that is strong, persuasive, and convincing.

Beginning with an introductory dialogue calling the community to join in praising

and thanking God, the preface sets forth, in the body of its content, a particular reason for praising God on this occasion. It is always some aspect of God's goodness in creation and redemption. The missal is rich in prefaces: nearly 100 to choose from to fit the season or whatever the particular celebration may be.

Acclamation of Praise. Moved by the proclamation in the preface, the presiding priest invites all to sing the acclamation of praise: the "Holy, Holy, Holy." The assembly joins with the whole creation, as with one voice the entire communion of saints gives glory to God.

Calling Upon God to Send the Spirit. God is asked to send the Holy Spirit to achieve a twofold conversion: changing the bread and wine into the Body and Blood of Christ and conforming all of us to the image of Christ.

This calling upon the Holy Spirit reminds us of our need, as individuals and as community, to be open to the workings of the Spirit, who comes to change our behavior (morality) and our consciousness (spirituality). We are called to experience ongoing conversion and to grow in faith in both our individual lives and our lives as the community of God's people.

Institution Narrative. The priest narrates what Jesus did at the Last Supper, as he asks God's Spirit to do for us now precisely what Jesus did at the supper. That is why the *Catechism of the*

Catholic Church speaks of "the words of institution" rather than "the words of consecration" (1362). The action of the Holy Spirit empowers the words of Christ, spoken by the priest, to effect the real presence, under the appearances of bread and wine, of the Body and Blood of Christ. The priest is instructed at this point to show the host and the cup to the people.

Memorial Acclamation. Immediately following the institution narrative, the deacon or the priest extends the invitation: "The mystery of faith." Several proclamations may be used, each proclaiming the paschal mystery; namely, the whole plan of God realized in Christ's death and resurrection and to be brought to completion in his return in glory.



CNS FILE FROM CROSIERS

Remembering. God's saving and liberating actions, accomplished in Christ, are remembered, not as past events, but as events that continue to accomplish their effects here and now. Remembering is not just a recalling of the past. It is making the past present in our midst. This bringing of the past into the present is what Jesus meant when he said, "Do this in memory of me." The words of remembrance vary from one eucharistic prayer to another, but there is always a remembrance of the Lord's death and resurrection. Sometimes the Ascension is mentioned. At times there is even a projection into the future, when Christ will come again.

Offering. All eucharistic prayers include an offering that is closely linked with the remembering. This is very clear and in its simplest form in Eucharistic Prayer 2, in which the priest says, "Therefore, as we celebrate the memorial of his Death and Resurrection, we offer you, Lord, the Bread of life and the Chalice of salvation."

Intercessions. In Eucharistic Prayer 1, there are intercessions before and after the institution narrative. In the other eucharistic prayers, they are joined to the invocation of the Holy Spirit said over the people. There is a general request to share in the blessings of the eucharistic action and then specific remembrances for the Church, its ministers, and members, as well as for the dead.

Thus, in the eucharistic prayer all of God's creation is brought together—from the angels (in the "Holy, Holy, Holy") to the good things of the earth, to the entire communion of saints.

Final Doxology. The eucharistic prayer concludes with a stirring expression of praise that permeates the entire prayer.

This concluding prayer is called the "Lesser Doxology" to distinguish it from the "Greater Doxology," which is the Gloria of the Mass. The doxology (statement of praise) summarizes the eucharistic prayer, which concludes as it began: the Church offers praise and glory to God. Note the formula that is used: to the Father (Abba) through Christ, the unique High Priest present in the midst of the assembled community, in the Holy Spirit by whose action the twofold change (of the bread and wine and of the assembled people) has been affected: "Through Him, and with Him, and in Him, O God, Almighty Father, in the unity of the Holy Spirit, all glory and honor is yours, for ever and ever."

(continued on back page)

'REMEMBER ME'

It's interesting that in almost all of the eucharistic prayers the words still make clear that the Eucharist was originally celebrated in the midst of an actual meal. After the words are said over the bread, the priest says: "In a similar way, when supper was ended, he took the chalice." This is especially surprising, since the meal context of the Eucharist disappeared very early—probably in the first century—and the Eucharist became a ritual rather than an actual meal.

Is this tenacious retaining of the memory of a meal perhaps intended to tell us that all the meals we share should remind us of the Eucharist? This realization could give new meaning especially to family meals we share together.

'MY PEACE I GIVE YOU'

Jesus' peace prayer makes an important distinction between the Church and the kingdom. Perfection is found only in the kingdom, not in the Church. Throughout history the Church has, at times, been all too ready to identify the Church with the Kingdom. At such times we have ignored the clear teaching of this prayer: that the Church is the place of sin and faith. It is only the kingdom that is the place of lasting peace and perfect unity. We pray for a taste of that kingdom here on earth.

DIG DEEPER

- How is the entire Eucharist an offering?
-
- Why is remembering key to the Eucharist?
-
- How is Communion more public than private?

(continued from page 3)

Final Acclamation. An enthusiastic *Amen* places the seal of the community’s approval on all that has been said and done in the eucharistic prayer. The three acclamations of the people (the Holy, Holy acclamation of praise, the Memorial Acclamation, the Great Amen or final acclamation) make abundantly clear that the eucharistic prayer, while proclaimed by the priest, is yet the prayer of the entire assembly or, better still, the prayer of Christ and his people.

During the doxology and the final acclamation, the host and the cup are raised on high as a gesture of offering. This offering is the principal offering in the Eucharist, not what we sometimes call the offertory (the Preparation of the Gifts ceremony).



Sign of Peace. All are invited to exchange a sign of peace. While this often becomes a joyous moment of greeting others, we need to remember that its primary meaning is to be an expression of our need for forgiveness and our desire to receive it and give it to our sisters and brothers.

Communion. Following the Lamb of God prayer asking for God’s mercy, we receive the Body and Blood of the Lord. It is important to remember that it is the whole Christ (Christ and the members of his Body) that we receive. Communion, therefore, is not a solitary experience in which we shut out

all others except Christ. Our “Amen” to the eucharistic ministers’ “the Body of Christ” is our yes to Christ and to all who are joined to him.

Concluding Rites. After a brief period of reflection on what we have experienced, the Eucharist concludes quickly with the priest-president’s blessing and the challenge to go forth and live what we have celebrated. The community that has gathered for the Eucharist now becomes the scattered community, as people strive to live out the challenges of the gospel in the varied ways of life to which God has called them. They bring Christ to the world, but they also discover him there.

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William H. Shannon, a priest of the Diocese of Rochester, now deceased, was professor emeritus of history at Nazareth College, Rochester, New York. His several books include ‘Something of a Rebel’: Thomas Merton, His Life and Works: An Introduction (St. Anthony Messenger Press).

THE COMMUNION RITE: OUR YES TO CHRIST

Lord’s Prayer. The Communion rite begins with the Lord’s Prayer, moves into the sign of peace, and concludes with the actual receiving by priest and people of the Body and Blood of the Lord. The Lord’s Prayer is a prayer of unselfish petition, as we pray for the full coming of God’s reign and express our need for God. The embolism (“Deliver us, Lord . . .,” the prayer expanding the final petition of the Lord’s Prayer) asks for peace, for deliverance from sin, and for protection from the anxiety that seems so prevalent among so many in today’s society.

Peace Prayer. This beautiful prayer, recalling Jesus’ promise of peace to the fledgling community of his beloved followers, asks the Lord to turn his gaze away from our numerous sins and look kindly on our faith.

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