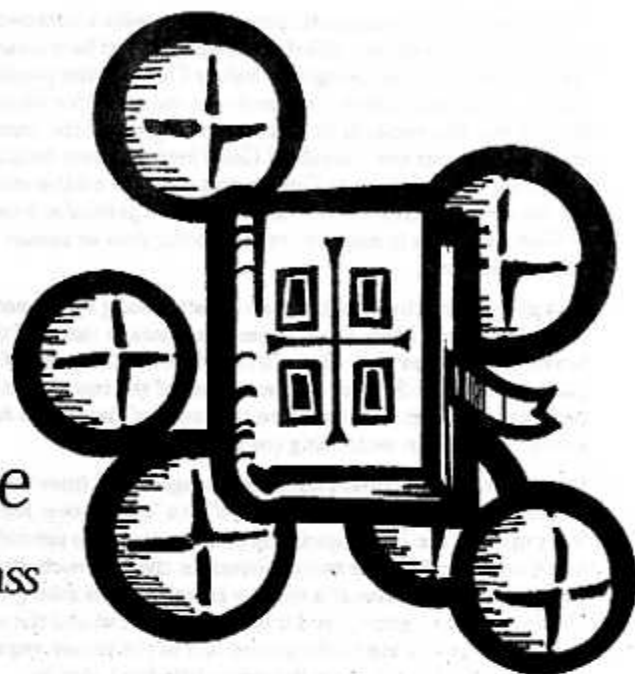


Give Thanks and Praise

A Popular Explanation of the Mass



Part 8

The Liturgy of the Eucharist (c)

Eucharistic Prayer

Tradition of the Eucharistic Prayer

We trace the origins of the eucharistic prayer to a Jewish prayer, known as the "berakah." For example, the form of the prayer used by Jesus over the cup at the Last Supper began by praising God for all creation, especially the creation of life. God was then praised for his workings in human history. Finally there was a request that God's creative and redemptive action be continued and renewed.

The apostles, gathering for table fellowship after Christ's resurrection and ascension, did so "in memory" of the Lord. The traditional Jewish forms over the bread and wine were utilized. Eventually the early Christians began to use the relatively long prayer over the cup as the basis for a prayer of praise and thanksgiving over the bread and wine together. It is from this prototype that the eucharistic prayer originated. A more explicit coloring and expansion developed to highlight the community's experience of Christ. Secondary elements were added or elaborated at different points in the general structure of the prayer. Eventually improvisation of the text on the basis of the inherited model gave way to fixed forms which differed according to geographic regions.

Unlike the eastern liturgies, the Roman Church for centuries knew only one eucharistic prayer, the Roman Canon. Within recent years, however, we have seen the addition of other eucharistic prayers. Some make great use of texts recaptured from our early history, whereas others are newly composed. We can anticipate that other forms of the eucharistic prayer will be approved in the future. This development, reflecting the tradition of the Church, enriches our expression of the eucharistic mystery.

Nature of the Eucharistic Prayer

The eucharistic prayer is a statement of joyful praise and thanksgiving which summarizes what it means for us to celebrate the eucharist. Like the proclamation of the scriptures themselves, the prayer proclaims the past, present, and future saving actions of God among us. It is a public prayer in which we the Church praise and thank God for his gift—for his transforming and unifying power in our lives, especially as made present in Christ who abides among us.

Although it is the task of the ordained priest to lead this prayer and to address the Father in the name of Christ, we must not forget that he does so on our behalf. As the wording of the prayers remind us, it is "we" who praise, it is "we" who give thanks. It is everyone present who joins Christ in acknowledging the works of God and in offering the sacrifice. This is why the Church has recently incorporated various acclamations within the eucharistic prayer. Through our enthusiastic participation in these expressions of belief, we visibly show that the eucharistic prayer is a prayer of each and everyone of us.

The Dynamic of the Eucharistic Prayer

The eucharistic prayer is essentially one prayer, not a series of short prayers strung together like a cars in a train. And yet we can discover several elements or focal points which highlight the themes permeating the whole text. These are:

- Thanksgiving;
- Acclamation;
- Invocation (Epiclesis);
- Narrative of the Institution and Consecration;
- Remembering (Anamnesis);
- Offering;
- Intercessions;
- Final Statement of Praise (Doxology).