

Three Minute Liturgical Catechesis

Article 14: Prayers of the Baptized

The deacon or the lector says, "For our Holy Father and all the leaders of the church, let us pray to the Lord." And all of us immediately know how to respond: "Lord, hear our prayer." This form of prayer was new to Catholics after the Second Vatican Council, but by now the response is almost automatic. The danger with automatic responses, of course, is that we tend to forget the deeper meaning of what we do and say.

The petitions that follow the Profession of Faith are called the Prayer of the Faithful or the General Intercessions. Each name tells us something important about this prayer.

It is called the Prayer of the Faithful because this prayer is said only by those who are baptized, those who belong to the Order of the Faithful. Remember that the catechumens, who are not yet baptized, are dismissed before this prayer begins. This is a time when we who are baptized carry out one of the responsibilities that flows from our baptism—to pray for the needs of the world. By baptism we share in the priesthood of Christ. As Christ prayed for and gave his life for the good of all people, so we are called to offer prayers and intercessions for the needs of all people today.

The General Instruction of the Roman Missal says that this prayer generally includes four main categories of intentions: "for the needs of the Church, for public authorities and the salvation of the whole world, for those burdened by any kind of difficulty and for the local community" (# 70). There may be more than one petition in any of those categories, but these general areas remind us that the prayer is to be universal in scope. It seeks to address the needs of all people, near and far. Thus the prayer is also called the General Intercessions.

At the same time, while they are to be broad in scope, the petitions are also to be current and local. They address the needs of our world in our own time, and they reflect local needs as well as global ones. This is really the reason that these petitions were restored to the Mass after the Second Vatican Council. The rest of the prayers at Mass are prescribed in the official books. Though we can choose from a number of options in the liturgy, we are not free to rewrite them or create our own. In the Prayer of the Faithful, by contrast, we are expected to write our own. Though published examples can give us ideas of how to compose them, the petitions are intended to be written each week in the local community. Otherwise they cannot reflect what is happening at this particular time and in this particular place.

One way we might all prepare for Mass each week is to consider what needs we would include in the Prayer of the Faithful. We might read the paper or watch the news and list current concerns that we might lift up in prayer. And we might well lift up such intercessions to God every day in our own prayers at home, for we share the priesthood of Christ wherever we are.