

Four-Minute Reflections on the Mass

Reflection 10: The Eucharistic Prayer, Part II

Our earlier talk (the first of three discussing the overall Eucharistic Prayer) brought us to the invocation of the Holy Spirit to sanctify or make holy the gifts on the altar, so that they may become the Body and Blood of the Lord.

This second part dovetails with the first. Just as the Eucharistic Prayer is part of a continuous action extending from the preparation of the gifts to Holy Communion, so are the words of institution part of the Eucharistic Prayer. They are an account of key events at the Last Supper, including the words used by Jesus to institute this rite, commanding that it be done perpetually by the Church in his memory, not just merely recalling it but re-presenting it.

The whole Eucharistic Prayer relates to the consecration, but the words of institution in particular are seen as actually bringing about the change in the gifts of bread and wine into the Body and Blood of Christ. We should listen intently with our ears, our minds and our hearts as these sacred actions unfold, noting the gestures of the priest at this time and the deliberation with which he speaks and acts. At this point, the priest is addressing himself primarily to God the Father. He is not doing something solely for the people to see and hear, but even more-so that the Father may see and hear this sacred action. Thus, the holy Sacrifice of Himself, which Christ instituted during the Last Supper, is affected and re-presented to the Father. The priest is acting in the person of Christ. Jesus is the victim and the priest.

The priest retells what Jesus said and did at the Last Supper, not just in words, but also in gestures - lifting the bread, raising his eyes to heaven, bowing over the gifts.

The

priest says the words of Christ over the bread, which the people have presented for this celebration, the very words he said to the apostles at the Last Supper *"Take this, all of you, and eat of it, for this is my body, which will be given up for you."* Without speaking, he presents or shows the host to the people for all to see and adore, then genuflects in adoration. This action may occur in silence or bells may be briefly rung.

The prayer and gestures are then repeated with the wine. The words are familiar, *"Take this, all of you, and drink from it, for this is the chalice of my Blood, the Blood of the new and eternal covenant, which will be poured out for you and for many, for the forgiveness of sins. Do this in memory of me."*

By the power of the Holy Spirit, the Body and Blood of Christ are now on the altar, but still under the appearance of bread and wine. This change in substance is referred to by the Church as "transubstantiation." The elements still taste like bread and wine, but Faith tells us that Christ is truly present. We are invited to worthily receive the body and blood of Christ for our spiritual nourishment and to deepen our union with God.

The priest then draws us directly into the action as he sings the *"Mystery of Faith"* referring to the Paschal Mystery of Christ's death, resurrection and presence among his people, inviting our acclamation. With a sense of the profound nature of what has unfolded on our behalf, the priest's invitation hopefully summons a heartfelt response sung by the entire assembly. We sing one of three responses addressed to Christ, for example: *"When we eat this Bread and drink this Cup, we proclaim your death, O Lord, until*

you come again" thereby affirming our belief that the whole mystery of the Risen Christ is present and active in the celebration.