

The Mass (Part XXII)

by Fr. Tim Church

MORE ABOUT THE EUCHARISTIC PRAYER

We left off with the beginning of an examination of the Eucharistic Prayer, the prayer over the bread and wine. Following the dialogue (“The Lord be with your” etc.) the preface is said (or sung) by the priest. Actually, the dialogue is considered part of the preface. They fit together. Seeing it this way, then, the second part is a praise of God, because “we do well always and everywhere to give you thanks...” The prefaces are somewhat variable. Different prayers are assigned for different days or seasons. Here is the one for Christmas:

Father, all-powerful and ever-living God,
we do well always and everywhere to give you thanks
through Jesus Christ our Lord.

In the wonder of the incarnation
your eternal Word has brought to the eyes of faith
a new and radiant vision of your glory.
In him we see our God made visible
And so are caught up in love of the God we cannot see.

And so, with all the choirs of angels in heaven
we proclaim your glory
and join in their unending hymn of praise:

The second part states the particular focus of the celebration, the particular actions that God has taken to save us. Here is the offering of thanks of the whole people to the Father. Finally the preparation for the Sanctus ends the preface. This is a very ancient praise of God (see Isaiah 6:3). It is very formal and exuberant at the same time, recalling the glory of God, an attribute that is reserved to him alone.

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.

The “Hosanna” is here a kind of praise of God. Originally, it was a plea for help. It became a sign of praise to the one who does help us. It frames the “blessing” of God for the “coming” of Jesus. He comes to save us. Here, this coming probably points to his second coming, but there is an echo of his first. This is an important aspect of the Eucharist that is more manifest in other places. Three points of

time meet, the first coming in which Jesus dies and rises from the dead, the present time in which we welcome our savior's presence among us, and the future coming when he will gather in his kingdom.

The Eucharistic prayer continues. The people kneel and only the priest stands at the altar. This arrangement of the posture of the assembly has been reemphasized recently to insure that it is properly understood that the priest alone has the power to preside at this prayer. A brief transition from the Sanctus begins this portion: "Lord, you are holy indeed, the fountain of all holiness."

Then comes the prayer invoking the Holy Spirit to descend upon the gifts. "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." This is called the Epiclesis, which means "to invoke or appeal to God. As the General Instruction of the Roman Missal referring to the Epiclesis says: "In which, by means of particular invocations, the Church implores the power of the Holy Spirit that the gifts offered by human hands be consecrated, that is, become Christ's Body and Blood, and that the spotless Victim be received in Communion be for the salvation of those who will partake of it." (General Instructions, 79.c)

(We will continue with this particular point next week.)