

THE MASS (PART XXV)

by Fr. Tim Church

THE CONCLUSION OF THE EUCHARISTIC PRAYER

One further note on the anamnesis (remembering) that we described last time. The words in Eucharistic Prayer II are:

“In memory of his death and resurrection, we offer you, Father, this life-giving bread, this saving cup. We thank you for counting us worthy to stand in your presence and serve you. May all of us who share in the body and blood of Christ be brought together in unity by the Holy Spirit.”

As we mentioned last time, we are incorporated into the saving event of the Cross through the offering of the Mass. The perfection of salvation is to be found in the union of the soul with God. We also appeal to God that His Holy Spirit will accomplish in us the unity for which Jesus prayed at the Last Supper.

“I pray not only for them, but also for those who will believe in me through their word, so that they may all be one, as you, Father, are in me and I in you, that they also may be in us, that the world may believe that you sent me.” (John 17:20-21)

This prayer that the Holy Spirit establish unity in us is called the second epiclesis. You may remember that the first prayer for the Holy Spirit was that he would descend on the bread and wine to make them holy. We now pray that the Holy Spirit will accomplish in us the fruits of our Savior’s sacrifice, that the world may be transformed by the unity of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

The intercessions follow. These have a long history, and at times have included every imaginable person. In Eucharistic Prayer II, the intercessions are brief, involve the church and are a kind of elongation of the second epiclesis prayer for the Holy Spirit:

“Lord, remember your Church throughout the world; make us grow in love, together with N. our Pope, N. our bishop, and all the clergy.”

Prayers for the departed are also be included here, as well as for all the faithful, that we may share in the communion of the saints:

“Remember our brothers and sisters who have gone to their rest in the hope of rising again; bring them and all the departed into the light of your presence. Have mercy on us all; Make us worthy to share eternal life with Mary, the virgin Mother of God, with the apostles, and with all the saints who have done your will throughout the ages. May we praise you in union with them, and give you glory ...”

The conclusion of the prayer is the doxology, to glorify God. Added to this is the mediatorial role of Jesus. It is through Jesus that we are able to praise the Holy Trinity.

“... through your son, Jesus Christ. Through him, with him, in him, in the unity of the Holy Spirit, all glory and honor is yours, almighty Father, for ever and ever.”

During these words, the priest shows the Body and Blood of Jesus to the people, and they respond with what is sometimes called “The Great Amen.” The Greek word “amen” simply means “truly” or “that is true.” However, it is used liturgically, even in the Old Testament (translating Hebrew), to be a congregational acclamation of assent. This particular response, at the end of the doxology is especially important, as it is the congregation’s way of joining the priest in the Eucharistic Prayer.

The “Our Father” follows. Its use in the Mass seems quite appropriate in that it summarizes and emphasizes many of the teachings that are inherent in the Mass. There are a few unusual characteristics about the manner of saying the Our Father.

The first is that it is said by the priest and people together. The earliest description of the use of the Our Father in the Mass had the priest saying it alone. It is something of a transition to communion, perhaps even a preparation for receiving communion. The inclusion of the prayer for forgiveness seems proper to this. It includes what is called an embolism (or insertion) that some people find very unusual.

“Deliver us, Lord, from every evil, and grant us peace in our day. In your mercy keep us free from sin and protect us from all anxiety as we wait in joyful hope for the coming of our Savior, Jesus Christ.”

Throughout history, various petitions have been added here. These point us both to the second coming of Christ and to the proper attitude during this our time of waiting.

The ending doxology is common to both Protestants and Eastern Catholics, but was unusual to most Latin Catholics before Vatican II. It is contained in some manuscripts of Matthew’s Gospel, but the most ancient copies of the Gospel do not contain it.

According to the new instructions, the people are to pray the Our Father standing with hands uplifted. Official attempts have been made to suppress the custom of holding hands during the Our Father, but it has had little effect. Some familiarity with the posture of uplifted hands will help us to enjoy this most ancient and wonderful posture of prayer, especially during the Our Father.