

The Eucharistic Prayer: The Preface

Our English words *eucharist* and *eucharistic* comes from the Greek word "eukaristos," which means "grateful" or "thanksgiving." It refers to the sacrament of the Lord's Supper, in which bread and wine becomes the body and blood of Christ. It is used to refer to the full celebration of the Mass, though, as we have seen, the Mass is actually made up of both the Liturgy of the Word, and the Liturgy of the Eucharist. The term *eucharist* is also more narrowly used to refer to the bread and wine themselves which become the body and blood of Christ, Holy Communion. The *Eucharistic prayer* within which this consecration of the bread and wine is a great prayer of praise and thanksgiving to God for all the gifts we have received, the greatest of which is Jesus himself. After the preparation of the gifts the Eucharistic Prayer begins with the **Preface**. The Preface begins with the dialogue between the priest and congregation: *The Lord be with you... And also with you. Lift up your hearts... We lift them up to the Lord.*

Let us give thanks to the Lord, our God... It is right to give him thanks and praise.
(these words will change somewhat next year when the revisions in the Mass take effect).

There are two particularly important things this dialogue tells us about the Eucharistic Prayer. The first is that the prayer involves all those present, and is not just the priest's prayer, though he speaks most of the prayer alone. In years past, prior to the renewal of the Liturgy called for by the Second Vatican Council, the Mass was seen as something the priest did for or on behalf of the people who were basically passive observers rather than active participants. But the whole Mass, including the Eucharistic Prayer, is not a private prayer of the priest but a communal prayer he proclaims in the name of all. The series of dialogues between celebrant and congregation throughout the Mass are an expression of this one prayer prayed by all in different parts. The other important thing the Preface signals about the entire Eucharistic Prayer is that is a prayer of praise and thanksgiving.

As noted above, it is the Church's great prayer of praise and thanksgiving to God for all the gifts we have received, the greatest of which is Jesus himself. The **Preface** speaks of the reasons for being thankful, with a **Preface** provided for each season of the Church year. Here we give our highest praise to God for all God's goodness and love, revealed to us in and through Jesus Christ. In Advent we are thankful for His coming to us at Bethlehem, in the Eucharist and in His second coming. At Christmas we rejoice in the gift of the Savior of the world. In Lent we are thankful for the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world. Easter gives us reason to rejoice that death has been conquered. Each season and feast has its own **Preface** which expresses how right and proper it is to give thanks to the Lord. This central prayer of the Mass, and of all our life as Christians, deserves our full attention and active participation. As our opening dialogue to the Preface says *It is right to give him thanks and praise!*

Please let us know what else about our faith tradition you'd like to find out more about.

Contact Fr. Dan Krettek at dkrettek@saintmaryhc.org.