

THE GATES OF HEAVEN ARE LIGHTLY LOCKED – PART 8  
THE POETRY AND THEMES OF THE FIRST TWO EUCHARISTIC PRAYERS

I. Eucharistic Prayer I exemplifies the Roman tradition of order, stability and the wisdom of the ages. It very strongly emphasizes the role of the Church as the earthly incarnation of the Messianic Kingdom and the centrality of the Eucharist in making the Church reflect the peace and order of the Kingdom.

A. This Eucharistic Prayer was for the most part composed by the 4<sup>th</sup> century and used by the Church in Rome at that time. St. Ambrose made that the Eucharistic Prayer for his diocese in Milan, and it quickly became the Eucharistic Prayer generally used throughout the West. It was the standard for Eucharistic Prayers in the Latin Church from the twelfth century to 1969 when the other Eucharistic Prayers were authorized.

B. The beginning of the prayer, right after the Sanctus also sets up a theme of the Eucharistic Prayer, indicating that it is through Christ that we offer our prayers to God. The idea is that all of our prayers are perfected in the prayer of Christ, who unites us to the Father. See, e.g., Rom. 5:2; Eph. 2:18, 3:12; 5:20; Heb. 10:18-20. Along similar lines there is an option to repeat the phrase “through Christ our Lord” four additional times in this Eucharistic Prayer.

C. The epiclesis is in two parts, surrounding the first set of intercessions. The epiclesis does not directly mention the Holy Spirit, but the Spirit’s role in bringing about the peace and unity of the Church is implied

1. The first part of the epiclesis asks the all merciful Father to accept and bless the “these gifts, these holy and unblemished offerings.” Nothing we offer God can truly be worthy of Him, but we ask Him to make them worthy by His grace and so allow us to enter into both the struggle and the joy of sacrificing to and with His Son. God promised to accept the sacrifices of the Israelites after cleansing them, see Ps. 51:20, Is. 66:20-21, Hos. 14:3, and now God will accept our sacrifices because we are His people.

- The gifts refer not only to the bread and wine, but to the gifts of all of our prayers, sacrifices, and lives. (The Latin terms for gifts, tributes and offerings may refer to gifts for the living, tributes for the dead, and the bread and wine offered for the Mass. See Mazzo, The Eucharistic Prayers of the Roman Rite 59. That meaning would make the idea roughly parallel the offerings of gold, myrrh and frankincense by the Magi.) Like the boy at the multiplication of the loaves, we bring God what we have, and through Jesus, God blesses them and makes them acceptable.

2. The second half of the epiclesis then asks God to bless the offering and make it spiritual and acceptable. God make the gifts acceptable by making God’s people, who offer them, acceptable. See Mal. 3:3-5; Matt. 5:23-25. The prophets spoke of a time in which the people of God would become a well ordered, peaceful kingdom, and thus their worship would be acceptable to God. Isaiah 2:2-5, 9:1-6,

66:18-24; 11:1-9; Ez. 36:25-36, 37:26-28; Joel 3:1-2, 4:17-20; Amos 9:11-15; Micah 4:1-8, 5:1-3; Zech. 13:1-6, 14:20-21; Mal. 3:1-4. The Acts of the Apostles presents this image in the early Church. See Acts 1:14, 2:42-47, 4:32-35. We are praying that we become such a people.

3. The prophets of ancient Israel spoke of a time when the Spirit, now known to us as the Holy Spirit, would bring about a holy people, acceptable to God. Is. 44:3; Ezek. 36:21-22; Joel 3:3:1-3. Through the Holy Spirit, the Apostles and other early Christians became this strong, united people of God. See, e.g., Acts 2:38, 8:18, 10:44-48. And St. Paul asks that Christians maintain that same unity in the Spirit. See, e.g., 1 Cor. 21:1-12; Eph. 2:21-22; Gal. 5:16-26. Thus, there is an implied invocation of the Holy Spirit in these invocations for peace and order based upon the truth of God.

D. The first set of petitions emphasizes this theme of a united people of God who offers this holy sacrifice to God.

1. The first prayer is that God guard, unite and govern His Church and give her peace throughout the world. The desire for peace and unity under God's direction is a theme of Jesus' discourse at the Last Supper and a consistent theme of St. Paul. John 17:20-23; 1 Cor. 1:10-17, 12:1-12; 2 Cor. 13:11-12; Eph. 4:1-16, 25-3; Phil. 2:1-4; 1 Thess. 5:12-24. It is partially a request for a peaceful world, but it is more of a request for a peaceful Church in the midst of a world that may or may not be supportive. Jesus warns that tribulations will come, but that under God's guidance, they will become opportunities for witness. See, e.g., Matt 24:9-15; Mark 13:9-13. John 15:18-27; 21:18-19

- Included in this petition, as in all of the Eucharistic Prayers, is a petition for the Holy Father and the local bishop, as the guardians of the faith. The idea is that the shepherds in particular need prayers because of the difficulties and temptations of the office. See, e.g., Jer. 2:8, 10:21, 23:1-3; Ezek. 34; Acts 20:28; 1 Peter 5:2-4; Rom. 15:30-32; Eph. 6:18-20; Col. 4:2-4; 1 Thess. 5:25; 2 Thess. 3:1-2; Heb. 13:17.

2. The next petition is for the servants of God ("famuli," which more literally means someone who is both a servant and a member of the household), with special emphasis on particular people. The idea is that we are set aside as a consecrated people of God to offer Him worship and announce His kingdom. See, e.g., 1 Peter 2:9-10; Rev. 1:4-6.

3. The petition offers a "sacrifice of praise," picking up on St. Paul's reference to offering God a "sacrifice of praise" in the context of joining our life to Christ's by faithfulness, by struggling with Him, and by good works. See Heb. 13:15. The prayer then requests defense and God's protecting help. Christ is our Good Shepherd and, despite all of the dangers of the world, provides for His people. See, e.g., Ps. 23, John 10:1-17, 16:32-33.

4. The prayer then joins our petition to that of the saints.
  1. We join our prayers first to the glorious and ever virgin Mary, as all the Eucharistic Prayers do. The idea is that, like Elizabeth, the shepherds and Magi of old, we now prepare to welcome Christ into the world in her company.
    - We honor Mary as the mother of Jesus Christ “our Lord and God,” reflecting Thomas final recognition of Jesus after the Resurrection. John 20:28. See also Luke 1:43.
  2. Pope St. John XXIII added St. Joseph’s name to this Eucharistic Prayer. (Pope Francis, in one of his earliest acts, did the same for the other three main Eucharistic Prayers.) Part of the idea is that, as he protected Mary and the child Jesus, so now he continues to be with them and to protect the Body of Christ, the Church.
  3. We then invoke what the letter to the Hebrews calls the “cloud of witnesses” in their faith and prayer. Heb. 12:1; see also 2 Macc. 15:11-16; Sir. 44-51 the list of saints that follows here and in the midst of the second set of petitions is from the ancient Roman Martyrology, a list of saints.
    - It begins with the twelve apostles, who are at the foundation of the Church, see, e.g., Eph. 2:20; Rev. 21:14. It then proceeds onto five Popes, a bishop, a priest, a deacon, two soldiers and two physicians. (The list of the Apostles, however, includes St. Paul, but not Matthias, who replaced Judas Iscariot; Matthias will be in the second list of saints.)
    - Part of the idea is to connect the apostolic tradition to the early leaders of the Church listed in the second set of saints, which is in the midst of the second series of petitions.
    - That second list of saints, which comes later in the prayer, consists seven men and seven women, all martyrs, including the prophet John the Baptist, several early leaders of the Church (including St. Matthias), and seven the women martyrs, rich and working class, married women (Perpetua, Felicity and Anastasia) consecrated virgins (Agatha, Agnes and Lucy), and Cecelia, who with her husband consecrated her life to God. There is a strong emphasis on holiness in all states of life.
    - As with the Letter to the Hebrews, we ask that their merits and prayers, and those of all of the martyrs and saints strengthen us. See also 2 Macc. 5:12, Rev. 5:8.
5. The petitions end with three short intercessions.
  - We ask again that God accept this “oblation of our service” from His

family. The Passover was eaten by a family, and likewise, through Christ, we are united as the family of God, especially at the Mass. See Ex. 12:1-4. See, e.g., Matt. 12:46-49; Eph. 2:19; Gal. 3:23-4:7; 6:10; Rev. 12:7.

- We ask that God guide us into His peace. At the Last Supper, Jesus made clear the distinction between the peace that God offers and that of the world. John 4:27, 16:33. see also Eph. 2:14-18; Col. 1:19-20. As a first promise of the peace of the kingdom of heaven, the Church and each Mass is meant to bring about a sign of that peace and righteousness on earth, thus fulfilling, at least in that time and place, the glorious prophesies of a righteous, peaceful, kingdom of light. See, e.g., Isaiah 2:2-5, 8:23-9:6, 11:1-9; Hos. 14:5-8; Amos 9:13-15; Micah 4:1-5; Ps. 72

- Finally we ask that God save us from damnation and count among His elect. Part of the idea is that the coming of Christ creates a need to make a decisive choice. See, e.g., Matt. 3:20, 12:30. In anticipation of the final coming of Christ, in which the wheat will be separated from the weeds, see Matt. 13:24-30, 36-43, we ask once again that we be among the chosen ones who can stand in the presence of Christ.

E. The Institution Narrative combines the narratives of the Eucharistic offering at the Last Supper, as described in the Gospels of Matthew, Mark and Luke and in 1 Corinthians 14. However, the Roman Canon adds two phrases.

1. First, it twice, once each over the bread and wine, refers to Jesus' "holy and venerable hands" The adjective "holy" is a more Biblical term; the adjective "venerable" is more Roman. But the idea is the same.

- The hands of Christ are the hands of God, which created the world, which lift the repentant sinner up, but are judgment upon those who reject Him. See Heb. 1:10, 10:31; Rev. 1:17. In His humanity, Jesus is also the firstborn of a new creation. See Col. 1:15, 18. And so, by joining heaven and earth, He opened a final "tabernacle, not made with human hands." Heb. 1:11-12. Entering into the Eucharist, created through the hands of Christ is entering into this tabernacle made by the hand of God.

- It is also poignant that the hands that consecrated the Eucharist would be pierced with nails within a day, and those pierced hands would continue to be a sign of the love and power of the risen Christ, for He shows that He is truly the same one who was crucified by showing the Apostles His pierced hands, feet, and side. See Luke 24:39, John 20:20, 27; see also Rev. 5:6.

2. Second, the Institution Narrative expressly says that Jesus "looked up to heaven."

- Although not in the accounts of the Eucharist, that phrase begins the final prayer of Jesus that the Gospel according to John records at the Last Supper. John 17:1. In this prayer, often called the "high priestly prayer of

Jesus,” Jesus asks the Father to guide, protect and unite His people. Likewise, the Eucharist guides, protects and unites the People of God.

- In addition the Gospels according to Mark and Luke describe Jesus as “looking up to heaven” in prayer before feeding the five thousand with five loaves and two fish. See Mark 6:41, Luke 9:16. Part of the idea is that God will provide whatever is needed to His people through the Eucharist.

F. The Roman Canon then turns to the memorial acclamation, which is common to all of the Eucharistic Prayers. The instructions consider this acclamation to be a part of the anamnesis, the recounting of the saving events of Christ’s passion, death, and resurrection. For the Eucharist re-presents the saving passion and death of Christ, allowing all the faithful may be present at the great Passover, as Jews of old were required to be at the individual Passovers that prefigured it. See Catechism 1362-68.

1. The acclamation of faith was added to this Eucharistic Prayer, and in fact to the whole idea of Eucharistic Prayers, apparently because of the personal efforts of Bl. Pope Paul VI, who in most other respects let the liturgists make the changes. Before this time, the priest prayed the Eucharistic Prayers from beginning to end without a break. Part of the idea is that Blessed Pope Paul VI wanted the people to join in the phrase, which ends each part of the institution narrative, “Do this in memory of me” by personally proclaiming their faith in the saving events. See 1 Cor. 11:26.

2. The acclamation begins with the priest saying, “The mystery of faith.” A mystery in the Scriptural sense of the term, is something that can be understood partially, and is frequently described in a symbolic way (e.g., by parables and visions) because a more text-like description is impossible for human language. See, e.g., Dan. 2:27-30; Matt. 13:10-11; Eph. 5:32; Rev. 17:7. One needs faith, the grace of God, and cooperation to peer more fully into the mysteries. Eph. 3:1-13; Col. 1:24-29. Jesus reveals the mystery of God’s love, which is beyond all description in Himself and in His life, death, resurrection and continued saving grace. See 1 Cor. 2:1-2; Eph. 1:7-10. And the Mass likewise reveals the mystery of Christ’s death and resurrection and continued presence among us under symbolic form until we obtain a risen body and purified intelligence are able to perceive Him face to face. See 1 Cor. 13:9-13; 1 John 3:1-3. And in fact, Part II of the Catechism, which describes the sacraments and all of the liturgies of the Church, is entitled “The Celebration of the Christian Mystery.”

3. There are three forms of the acclamation of faith.

- The first and most ancient acclamation is, “We proclaim Your death, O Lord, and profess Your Resurrection, until You come in glory.” This acclamation joins together the central mysteries of our faith, the redeeming death of Jesus, His triumph over death, and His return again in glory. Jesus took on death and overcame it. See 1 Cor. 15:1-28; Heb. 2:14-15. And likewise, we look forward to joining with Him when He returns to

restore all things. 1 Cor. 15:28, Rev. 22:20.

- The second response is, “When we eat this bread and drink this cup, we proclaim Your death Lord Jesus until You come again.” This response is taken straight from St. Paul’s instructions in First Corinthians about the importance of the Eucharist and of being properly prepared for it. See 1 Cor. 11:26. The idea is that the Eucharist is the renewal of our faith in Christ and unity with Him until all things are fulfilled.

- The third response is “Save us, Savior of the Lord, for by Your Cross and Resurrection, You have set us free.” The idea is that, by Christ, we have been set free from sin and corruption. See John 8:32-38, Rom. 8:2; Gal. 5:1; Rev. 1:4-6. And by receiving Him in the Eucharist we are pledging to live in that new freedom of the Spirit and Christ is pledging to be with us to maintain that life. See Rom. 8:28-39.

F. The Roman Canon then proceeds onto the rest of the anamnesis, recounting again Jesus’ death, resurrection, and ascension.

1. In the Latin, we profess our faith in God as His servants and as His holy people. The idea is to remind us again both that we are servants of God and, by His grace, have been admitted into the glory and dignity of His family. The two considerations form a consistent balance in Christian thought. For example, at the Last Supper Jesus said, “I call you friends,” but also said that this friendship is based upon carrying out His commands. John 15:14-17; see also Romans 6:15-23, 8:14-17; 1 Peter 1:1-15, 2:9-10, 16.

2 Again, we recount the events of salvation, including here expressly Christ’s ascension to rule over His people in glory from heaven. We thus recount again the same message preached right from the beginning of the Church. See, e.g., Acts 2:22-33, 5:29-32.

G. The Canon then proceeds onto the offering of the gifts in a manner that very much refers back to the Old Testament prefigurings of Christ’s sacrifice and of the Eucharist.

1. It begins by referring to the offering of the “this pure victim, this holy victim, this spotless victim, the Holy Bread of eternal life and Chalice of everlasting salvation” to the majesty of God.

- Part of the idea is that the Passover Lamb, as well as all of the other animal sacrifices, was to be perfect animals. Offering a blemished animal was an abomination, for it could not satisfy God. This requirement was not only a matter of justice to God, but a prefigurement of the fact that only a sinless human could make the perfect sacrifice required truly to free the human race and reconcile us with God. Thus the old animal sacrifices were merely first symbols of the final sacrifice of Christ. See Heb. 10:1-18.

2. The offering then asks God to accept the sacrifice as He accepted those of Abel, Abraham, and Melchizedek.

- Abel offered the best of his flock and, therefore, his offering was acceptable. Cain did not do so and, rather than repent, killed Abel out of jealousy, making Abel the first martyr, often referred to in Scripture as the first model of all who are beloved by God because of their suffering for righteousness. See Matt. 23:35, Luke 11:51, Heb. 11:4, 1 John 3:12. Jesus would then become the final fulfillment and glory of the tradition started by Abel. See Heb. 13:23-24.

- Abraham poignantly obeyed God when he thought that God was commanding him to sacrifice his only son Isaac upon Mount Moriah (later to become Mount Zion, the center of Jerusalem). Isaac carried the wood of his sacrifice up the mount and was stretched out upon the wood for the sacrifice, until an angel came and stopped the sacrifice. See Genesis 22. Isaac thus was a prefigurement of Jesus, the only beloved Son who carried the wood of His sacrifice up Calvary, but instead completed the sacrifice merely offered by Abraham and Isaac. The Letter to the Hebrews describes the restoration of Isaac back, after Abraham placed his trust in God, to be a prefigurment of the resurrection promised to the faithful. Heb. 11:17-20.

- Melchizedek, the priest king of Salem, also later to become Jerusalem, offered bread and wine, the symbols Jesus would take up at the Last Supper. Gen. 14:18. He represents the primordial priesthood that Jesus would inherit and fulfill. Ps. 110:4, Heb. 7:1-17.

3. The priest then asks that the angel of God take the sacrifice, now Jesus Himself, to the altar in heaven and that we receive all blessings from sharing in the sacrifice of the Eucharist.

- The angel bringing the sacrifice to the altar in heaven reflects God's acceptance of the Eucharist, as the angels would indicate God's acceptance of a sacrifice and a person's efforts by taking up the sacrifice to heaven with fire. See Judges 6:19-23; 13:19-23; see also Rev. 8:3-4. It also indicates that the Mass joins the worship in heaven. See, e.g., Rev. 5:6-14, 11:15-19.

- The second part indicates that all blessings are contained in the Eucharist, for all blessings are in Christ, but that we need God's grace in order for them fully to benefit us. See Eph. 1:3, 5:1.

H. The Canon then proceeds onto intercessions for the dead and for the faithful.

- It begins with a prayer for the dead, referring to them who "sleep in Christ." The idea is that, especially in New Testament theology, people who die in faith are considered asleep, not fully dead. See, e.g., Mark 5:39; John 11:11; 1 Thess.

4:13-14. We ask that they receive refreshment, light, and peace. Refreshment is the renewal that comes from God. Supernatural light allows them to see God and His glory face to face. And peace is the reward for struggling through life. This petition reflects the promises of a peaceful and glorious kingdom in which Christ is the light of the nations. See, e.g., Rev. 21:4-22:6

- The Canon then asks that we share in the communion of saints. Even though we are sinners, we are also servants and friends of God. (Again the term *famuli* for servants emphasizes that we are both servants and God and in the family of God.) With the virtue of hope, we recognize our sinfulness, and the need to struggle against it, but also place confidence that, with God's help, we can achieve perfection. See Acts 2:37-38; Rom. 3:21-26; Col. 1:9-14. The idea is in part that, on earth, we are holy with God's grace, although still weighed down by sin. See, e.g., Ps. 25; Rom. 7:21-25.

I. The conclusion recounts that God is the source of all good things and brings them life and holiness. We both thank God for giving us all gifts and recognize that, by His grace, these gifts become holy. See, e.g., Ps. 104; James 1:17-18. As with all the Eucharistic Prayers, it then ends, saying "Through Him, with Him, in Him, in the unity of the Holy Spirit, all glory and honor are Yours, almighty Father, forever and ever." This doxology is based upon a portion of the letter to the Romans, which transitions from praising the unfathomable love and majesty of God to an exhortation that the faithful present ourselves as sacrifices to God and be transformed by God to become one with Christ and make the Church have the unity of the one body of Christ. See Romans 11:36. This transformation is the goal of receiving the Eucharist. See John 6:56.

II. Eucharistic Prayer II uses concise phrasing to emphasize the creation of a holy people of God through the death and resurrection of Christ and through the power of the Holy Spirit. By entering into the mystery of God's love for us, we become a people worthy to worship God in joy forever.

A. There is an optional preface, which describes God's creation, the Incarnation, and redemption through Jesus in very concise terms. The preface also describes God's self-manifestation that calls people into His holiness.

1. The Preface begins by referring to Jesus Christ as the Word, through whom God created all things. Genesis 1 describes God as creating through speaking. In one sense, the terminology is metaphor; but in another sense, human speech is only an image of God-self-revelation, first through creation, and finally through His Son. See, e.g., Wis. 13:1-9; Act. 17:22-31; Rom. 1:16-20. And, throughout history, the words of God are powerful for judgment of redemption. See, e.g., Is. 55:10-11; Jer. 1:9-9; Eph. 6:17; Heb. 4:12. The prologue of John refers to Jesus as the Word, the self-manifestation of God, through whom He made the world, and through whom He redeems the world. John 1:1-2, 14; see also 1 John 1:1; Rev. 19:13.

2. Summarizing the message of the angel Gabriel, see Luke 1:26-38, the preface

clearly refers to the Holy Spirit in the Incarnation, giving it a Trinitarian emphasis.

3. The reference to Jesus “stretching out His hands as He endured His passion” most directly uses the language that Jesus uses to predict St. Peter’s crucifixion: “you will stretch out your hands.” John 21:18. It should be noted that, in the Old Testament, the image of God’s outstretched hands reflect God’s creative power, see Jer. 27:5, 32:17, and His protection of His faithful people and His judgment upon the unfaithful and the enemies of His people. See, e.g., Duet 4:34, 5:15; Ps. 136:12; Ezek. 20:32-38.

4. The preface introduces the theme of Jesus gaining a “holy people” for God. The idea of holiness in the Bible is difficult to describe, but it involves being set apart from the world and drawn upwards to the realm of the all holy God and His angels, and thus reflecting His glory in good deeds and witness before the world. See Is 6:1-6; 2 Cor. 6:14-7:1; Heb. 12:10-14; Vatican II Council, Lumen Gentium 39-40.

- Both the Sabbath and certain areas, such as the Temple, are holy, for they are set aside for God and bring His glory to His people. See, e.g., Ex. 20:8-11; Duet. 5:12-15; Chron. 29, Is. 58:13; 64:10

- The Chosen People were called to be God’s holy people, for they were set aside for God to bear witness to Him before all the world. See, e.g., Ex. 19:6, Lev. 20:7; Duet. 7:1-11; Jer. 2:3. And the prophets foretold that God would call again a holy people to glorify Him. See Ezek. 36:23-36, 37:23-28; Joel 4:17-18; Zech. 14:5, 21. Thus, the New Testament refers to faithful Christians and the saints as “the holy ones” and “a holy people.” See, e.g., Romans 16:2, Eph. 5:3; 1 Peter 2:5, 9-10; see also Rev. 5:8, 8:3 (referring to the angels offering the prayers of the holy ones, who could be the faithful on earth, the saints in heaven, or both.)

B. The brief post-Sanctus prayer then picks up on this theme of holiness. The prayer refers the God as the “font of all holiness.” That term has some background in the image of a cleansing stream of water flowing from the Temple or the city of God and nourishing a new kingdom. See, e.g., Ezek. 47; Zech. 13:1; Rev. 22:1.

C. The epiclesis then asks God to send forth Spirit upon the gifts to make them holy that they may be fitting for Christ’s presence.

1. The old Temple was built exactly as God had commanded it (e.g., with gold overlay, elaborate decorations) to make it a place fit for the glory of God. See 1 Kings 6, 7:13-51; 1 Macc. 4:36-59; 2 Macc. 10:1-8. All the more, Mary was pure and full of grace so that she might be a fitting vessel for God. See Luke 1:26-37.

2. Now we ask God to sanctify even these earthly objects of bread and wine that Jesus may be present through them.

3. The prayer presents the Holy Spirit as coming to the bread and wine “like the

dewfall.” That phrasing reflects the Old Testament image of a cleansing morning water that purifies and consecrates the land and the people. See Ps. 133:3; Hos. 14:5-8.

D. The account of the institution of the Eucharist is direct and emphasizes both the tragedy of human unfaithfulness in saying that Jesus “was betrayed,” but also the willingness of Jesus to make the offering of Himself for us. The Father gave Jesus up to death, sending His Son into the world to live, die, and rise again, but Jesus’ sacrifice was also voluntary. Compare, e.g., Acts 2:23–24; Romans 4:24-25 with John 10:17-18.

E. As with the First Eucharistic Prayer, the offering refers to the Eucharist as “the Bread of life and the Chalice of salvation.” (The First also uses the terms eternal and everlasting.)

1. The term bread of life comes straight from Jesus bread of life discourse in which He increasingly indicates that He will give Himself to us to eat, in part to sustain us through life as the manna sustained the Israelites in the desert. See John 6:30-65. The concept of a “chalice of salvation” is based in part upon Psalm 116:13, which celebrates God’s salvation of His people that they may give Him praise together. The idea is that the Eucharist, received worthily, both sustains us as a people and preserves us from sin, which would keep us from giving God the praise He is due.

2. The offering then moves on to thanking God for “hold[ing] us worthy” to be in His presence and minister Him.

- In the old covenant, God had selected the Levite especially to be in His presence and serve in His Temple. See, e.g., Duet. 10:8; 2 Chron. 29:11. Initially, He had wanted all of the people in His presence, but they were afraid. See Ex. 20:18-25. After the worship of the golden calf, God had selected the tribe of Levi alone to minister. See Ex. 32:25-29.

- Isaiah prophesied of a time in which the people of God would be reestablished as a priestly people, although even then there would be specific priests. See Isaiah 61:6, 66:21.

- Jesus Christ fulfilled this promise to make all of the people of God to be holy, but with specific priests carrying on the priestly role given to the Apostles of offering the Eucharist and other sacraments. See 1 Peter 2:9; Rev. 1:6. Jesus likewise described how we can serve Him by serving the least of His brothers. See Matt. 25:31-46. It is an astonishing thought that we are able to bring goodness to God, the Almighty source of all goodness.

- Thus, St. Paul described as the Church as the temple of God in which we come into the presence of Christ. See 1 Cor.3:10-17; 2 Cor. 6:16; Eph. 6:19-22. See also Rev. 3:12.

F. The intercessions then ask especially for the unity of the Church, the salvation of the deceased, and the advancement of the living towards being worthy to worship God with the saints.

1. The Eucharistic Prayer begins by asking God to unify the Church, making her united in Christ especially through the Body of Christ that is the Eucharist. This prayer picks up on a theme of St. Paul, especially prevalent in 1 Corinthians that the Church is the Body of Christ, with unity and diversity. In that letter, St. Paul very much connects the Eucharist with the unity of the Church. See 1 Cor. 10:14-17; see also Romans 12:1-8; Eph. 2:14-18. He describes the Holy Spirit as bringing about the unity of the body of Christ. See 1 Cor. 12; see also Joel 3; Acts 2:1-21. Along similar lines the prayer asks that the whole Church grow together in love, indicating mutual reliance upon all of the people of God. Part of the idea, as St. Paul points out, is that what affects one person in the Church affects all people, for good or ill. See 1 Cor. 12:26.

2. As with the other Eucharistic Prayers, the Pope, the bishop and all the clergy are especially remembered, in part due to the difficulties and prominence of such vocations.

3. The intercessions then turn towards the deceased “who have fallen asleep in the hope of the resurrection.”

- There is again a notion that those who die in the grace of God are at rest. See, e.g., Acts 7:60; 1 Thess. 4:13-18. Part of the idea is that many die in God’s grace, but still need prayers for they still have sins to be purified of. See, e.g., 2 Macc. 12:38-46; 1 Cor. 3:10-17. The idea of the deceased being “at rest” brings to mind an image of the ideal Sabbath in which one is wholly devoted to rejoicing in the Lord. See Heb. 4:1-11.

-There is also the intriguing reference to those “all who have died in [God’s] mercy” as a group in addition to those who fell asleep in the hope of the resurrection. There is perhaps here a notion of God extending His mercy to those who do not explicitly believe in the resurrection, but who seek it nonetheless.

-The prayer also asks God to welcome the dead “into the light of [His] face.” There is a notion that, when we see God face to face in the light of glory, that vision will transform us into the people whom we were ever meant to become. See 1 Cor. 13:12; John 3:1-3; Catechism 1028.

- The Eucharistic Prayer gives the option of including an intercession for a particular person, usually used at funeral and memorial Masses. It reflects the Pauline theology of baptism being a sharing in the death of Christ and, through that participation in the sacrifice of Christ, gaining new life with Him. See Romans 6:3-4; Col. 2:12.

4. The intercessions for God's mercy on us, the grace that make us worthy to be coheirs to heaven and to praise Him with the saints and angels now at each Mass as a first promise of making us worthy to praise Him forever with them.

- We need God's mercy in order to be joined with the angels and saints because of the distance between earth and heaven, and between sinful humanity and the pure hosts of heaven. See, e.g., Isaiah 6:1-6; Romans 7:23-24; Rev. 1:17. Compare Ps. 14 and 15.

-We are, in Christ, heirs to a great kingdom of everlasting glory. That is one promise of the Beatitudes, as Jesus emphasizes several times. See, e.g., Matt. 5:3, 5, 9-10, 25:14-46; Rev. 2:26, 3:21; see also Rom. 8:14-17; Gal. 4:1-7; Titus 3:4-7; James 2:5. At one level, we can never by our own actions or merits deserve such an inheritance. Nevertheless, by God's decree we can become worthy of this glorious destiny. See Catechism 2006 – 11.

- Because of God's grace, we can in fact celebrate the glory of God with the angels and saints on earth, and will forever in heavenly glory. This notion of a celebration with the angels and saints is a theme of the book of Revelation. See, e.g., Rev. 7:1-7; 5:6-14; 14:1-515:1-4; 19:11-8; see also Heb. 12:1-2, 22-24.