

THE GATES OF HEAVEN ARE LIGHTLY LOCKED: PART VII OVERVIEW OF THE EUCHARISTIC PRAYERS

I. The Eucharistic Prayer, or anaphora, is the summit of the Mass and in fact of the whole of Catholic life. Catechism 1352, 1407. Anaphora is a Greek term meaning an offering and lifting up of gifts to heaven. During the Eucharistic Prayer, Jesus Christ become present to us under the appearance of bread and wine.

A. There several different versions of the Eucharistic Prayers. But all of them combine eight elements: (1) thanksgiving; (2) an acclamation in which we join with the company of heaven to offer our praise to God; (3) the epiclesis, or calling upon the Holy Spirit to descend upon the bread and wine; (4) the words of institution that bring to the present Jesus' words consecrating the Eucharist at the Last Supper; (5) the anamnesis, which is a summary of the saving work of God; (6) the offering of the Eucharist to God, along with all of our lives; (7) intercessions; and (8) the final doxology bringing the prayer to a conclusion. See General Instructions to the Roman Missal 79.

B. After the preparation of the altar, the Preface introduces the Eucharistic Prayer and emphasizes the first two elements, thanksgiving and joining with the angels and saints. In that preface we, in the company of the angels and saints praise and give thanks to God through the Son and in the Holy Spirit for creation, redemption, and sanctification.

C. The highest part of the Eucharistic Prayer combines the: (1) the epiclesis, or invocation, in which we ask God to send the Holy Spirit upon the bread and wine; and (2) the institution narrative which describes the Last Supper and brings to the present Jesus' consecration of the Eucharist at that first Mass.

D. Each version of the Eucharistic Prayer also continues on with the anemnesis, which recounts the saving work Jesus and then the offering of this work and our own cooperation back to the Father. There are also intercessions that ask the Almighty God to guide the Church, the entire world, and all souls on the way to heaven.

E. The Eucharistic Prayer ends with the doxology "Through Him, with Him, in Him, in the unity of the Holy Spirit, all glory and honor is Yours, almighty Father, forever and ever" and the great Amen, confirming our faith in the entire action just expressed.

F. These elements reflects the Last Supper. The Last Supper was a Passover meal, and thus would have begun by praising God and giving thanks to Him for His saving word, as we do in the Preface. Then, as the Last Supper progressed, Jesus promised to send the Spirit to continue this saving work, John 14:26, 15:26, 16:5-15, a promise that is fulfilled in the epiclesis. He then instituted the Eucharist with the words we use (in translation) at Mass. See Matt.26:26-29; Mark. 14:22-25; Luke 22:15-20, 1 Cor. 11:23-25. He also recalled His own mission and the glory God gave Him and the word through it, John 17:1-7, and offered intercessions for His Apostles and all who would believe through them, see John 17:9-26.

G. There is a basic reflection of the divine presence coming down to the Temple at the Dedication by Solomon. For in that case, there was: (1) a joyful prayer of thanksgiving, 2 Chron. 5:12-13; (2) a sense of union with previous generations in building the Temple, 2 Chron. 6:1-6; (3) a request that God send forth His presence to the people, 2 Chron. 6:41-42; (4) the glory of God in fact coming upon the Temple, 2 Chron. 7:1-3; (5) a recollection of saving work of God, 2 Chron. 6: 1-9, 15-17; (6) and offering of the Temple to God, 2 Chron. 6:10-11; (7) intercessions that God assist His people and in fact all nations in doing His will and thus giving Him glory, 2 Chron. 6:18-40; and a final prayer of praise, 2 Chron. 7:3-6.

II. There are four main options for the Eucharistic Prayers. There are also two Eucharistic Prayers for Reconciliation, four Eucharistic Prayers for Various Needs and Occasions, and three for Masses where the majority of the congregation are children, i.e., those before about the age of thirteen.

A. Eucharistic Prayer I is commonly known as the Roman Canon because it was mostly the Eucharistic Prayer used in Rome from the mid-4th century onward.

1. Some of its elements, especially the Institution narrative, go back to the first century, and other elements added by St. Gregory the Great in the late sixth century as well as others.

2. It was used in almost all of the Latin Rite diocesan churches from about 1100 until 1969, when Eucharistic Prayers II, III, and IV were permitted. The reforms of the Council of Trent in the 16th century made it universal in Latin rite diocesan churches.

3. This Eucharistic Prayer tends to reflect the Gospel according to Matthew in its emphasis on structure, history and fulfilling the images of the Old Testament. It also focuses on the idea of sacrifice, the Church as the beginning of the Messianic Kingdom, and the communion of saints.

B. Eucharistic Prayer II is based upon the elements of a Eucharistic Prayer either composed or recorded by St. Hippolytus around 215.

1. Its style is blunt and to the point. Reflecting Marcan style and Pauline theology, it emphasizes God's grace and especially Jesus' sacrifice bringing forth renewal of the earth and making us holy and worthy of His presence.

2. Like Eucharistic Prayer IV, a specific preface is associated with this prayer. However, there is an option about whether to use that particular preface.

C. Eucharistic Prayer III draws heavily from the Eastern rites, especially the Byzantine and Maronite rites (the former based upon the patriarchy of Constantinople, and the latter having developed in Lebanon.)

1. It emphasizes the work of the Holy Spirit in drawing together the people of God and making us worthy and able to worship God.

2. There is a sense of the peace that God brings through Jesus Christ and through His Church.

D. Eucharistic Prayer IV is based roughly upon the eastern anaphora of the Catholic Church of ancient Antioch, one of the early centers of the faith..

1. Its preface and anemnesis are a broad summary of salvation history. In
2. Like Eucharistic Prayer III, it emphasizes the Church as the people of God, but also includes specific intercessions for those who seek God “with a sincere heart” and the dead “whose faith is known to [God] alone.”
3. This Eucharistic Prayer has a fixed preface, and thus cannot be used with any other preface. As a result, it cannot be used when another preface is required (e.g., solemnities, many feasts, and about half of the Sundays.)

E. There are two Eucharistic Prayers for Reconciliation that are particularly fitting for Lent and other occasions when repentance and reconciliation are important themes.

1. The Eucharistic Prayers of Reconciliation were composed for the Holy Years 1974-1975, but permission to use them for penitential occasions was extended at first for a limited time, and then indefinitely.
2. These Eucharistic Prayers emphasize both themes of God’s forgiveness of our sins, and our own need to reconcile with others. They also both expressly call for the Holy Spirit to come upon the people present. Like Eucharistic Prayer II, they also have prefaces associated with them, but those prefaces are optional.
3. The First Eucharistic Prayer of Reconciliation has many connections to Eucharistic Prayer IV and draws heavily upon the themes of covenant, family and return from exile, both literal and figurative.
4. The second Eucharistic Prayer for Reconciliation emphasizes people’s natural desire for peace and friendship and builds upon it by describing how, only in Christ and only with the Holy Spirit, can that desire be fully realized.

F. The Eucharistic Prayers for Various Needs and Occasions can be used in special circumstances.

1. The bishops in Switzerland drafted these prayers in 1974 and received permission to use them. They prayers were later translated, and the Vatican gave permission for them to be used universally. Like Eucharistic Prayer IV, these prayers have fixed prefaces.
2. Each of these prayers emphasizes a different theme and is fitted for a different type of occasion. See Fr. Edward McNamara, “Follow-up: Eucharistic Prayers for Reconciliation,” ZENIT (March 18, 2008.)
 - a. The first of these options is entitled, “The Church progressing in the

path of unity" and focuses on how the Church is a prophetic sign of unity and peace for all of the world.

b. The second option is entitled, "God leads his Church in the way of salvation" and focuses on how God guides us throughout this life on a pilgrimage to the greater kingdom

c. The third option, entitled, "Jesus the way to the Father" and describes how Jesus Christ guides us in true freedom, light and love.

The fourth version is entitled, "Jesus, going about doing good" is similar to the third version and focuses on Jesus' compassion for the suffering all of those in need.

III. The Preface is a prayer of praise and thanksgiving for the glory of God and His saving work.

A. It begins "The Lord be with you," reflecting in part the words of the angel Gabriel to Mary at the Annunciation when the Son of God was about to come into the world for the first time. It also a common way in which St. Paul ended his letters. See 1 Thess. 5:27, 2 Thess. 3:18; 1 Tim. 6:21; 2 Tim. 4:22; Phil 25. As with the beginning of Mass, the response is "And with your spirit."

B. The phrase "lift up your hearts" and the response "we lift them up to the Lord" reflects both the idea of lifting up hands and voices in joyous praise of God, see, e.g., Ps. 63:5, 119:48, 134:2, and the idea that the heart is at the core of our worship and service of God, see, e.g., Jer. 31:33, Rom. 2:15, 2 Cor. 3:3; Heb. 8:10, 10:16

- The psalms and the Book of Lamentations also refer to lifting up one's soul in the context of a passionate plea for assistance in time of trouble. See Ps. 25:1, 86:6; Lam. 3:43; see also. Ps. 28:2

C. The phrase "Let us give thanks to the Lord our God" and the response "It is right and just" reflects the idea of thanking God and praising Him for His works, preparing ourselves again for His blessings is a part of the justice of the world, not something extra. It is natural to praise God, and all cultures throughout time and space have had a notion of this virtue of religion. See St. Thomas Aquinas, Summa Theologica Part II-II, question 81, art. 1-5.

- The terms right and just seem like the same thing, but in the Latin the words "iustus et dignus" imply: (1) rendering what is due (iustus, the basis for just): and (2) being worthy of praise or reward (dignus.) The implication is that our prayer is in itself an act of justice and also becomes even more worthy when we give God proper respect.

D. The preface then always begins with "It is right and just, our duty and our salvation always and everywhere to give You thanks (more literally "it is truly fitting, just, equitable, and beneficial always and everywhere to give You thanks"), holy Father, lord of heaven and earth through Christ our Lord" or some close variation of these words.

1. This acclamation reflects the importance of thanksgiving to God because of the inherent fittingness of doing so and because this thanksgiving in turn opens us to

more blessings. See, e.g., Luke 17:11-19; Col. 3:12-17; Tobit 12:6.

2. The term Eucharist is derived from the Greek term for thanksgiving, reflecting the fact that the accounts of the first Eucharist, as well as those of the multiplication of loaves, consistently say that Jesus blessed the food and gave God thanks. See Matt.26:27; Mark. 14:23; Luke 22:17, 1 Cor. 11:24.

3. This idea of giving thanks to God because of His saving works and His presence also reflects the prayer of praise and thanksgiving sung by the priests when the Ark of the Covenant came to Jerusalem, upon the beginning of the Messianic reign as prophesied by Isaiah, and by Mary and Zechariah in their celebration of the conception of Jesus and the birth of John the Baptist. See 1 Chron. 16:8-30; Ps. 105; Isaiah 12:2-6; Luke 1:46-66, 68-79. The elders in heaven also sing a hymn of thanks before the ark of the covenant is opened. Rev. 11:17-18.

4. When we give God thanks for the benefits He has bestowed upon us, we become more open to the greater gifts that He wishes to pour forth. An in particular, viewing all the goodness of the past as a visible signs of God's invisible goodness prepares us to see in the Eucharist the visible signs that truly bring forth the invisible presence of Jesus Christ.

E. The preface ends with a call for the angels and often the saints to join us in singing God's praises. This prayer, often called the Sanctus (Latin for "Holy") reflects both the song that angels and saints sing to God in heaven and the joyous proclamation of the people as Jesus entered into Jerusalem just before His passion, death and resurrection.

1. Isaiah and Revelation both record the angels in heaven singing "Holy, Holy, Holy Lord God of hosts." Is. 6:3; Rev. 4:8. Isaiah records them adding "all the earth is filled with Your glory" and God's glory filling the temple in heaven. Part of the idea here is that we are joining with the angels themselves in their worship of God around the Temple in heaven.

2. When Jesus entered into Jerusalem the people acclaimed "Hosanna in the highest. Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord. Hosanna in the highest" Matt. 21:9, Mark 11:9-10; Luke 19:38; John 12:13. This acclamation reflects Psalm 118, a classic psalm of thanksgiving which praises God for His saving work. We are also joining with the people of the Old Covenant as they welcomed Jesus into Jerusalem. And, as Jesus cleansed the Temple, we ask God then to cleanse our hearts and minds that we will be faithful to him as many in Jerusalem sadly were not.

G. In most of the Eucharistic Prayers, this thanks and praise for God's saving work continues into the Eucharistic Prayer after the Sanctus.

IV. In the Epiclesis, the priest then asks God to send the Holy Spirit upon the gifts to make them acceptable to Him so that they may become the body and blood of Jesus. (Eucharistic Prayer I does not directly mention the Holy Spirit, but asks that God make the gifts “spiritual and acceptable.”)

A. The idea of invoking the Holy Spirit is in part that the Holy Spirit came upon Mary at the Incarnation. Luke 1:35.

B. In the Old Testament, God would send fire upon a sacrifice to indicate that it was acceptable to God. See, e.g., Lev. 9:24; Judges 6:21; 1 Chron. 21:26; 2 Chron. 7:1; 1 Kings 18:38. In the New Testament, the Holy Spirit came in the form of wind and fire to give the early Christians the power to bring forth the kingdom of God on earth. See Acts 2. When he hid the ark of the Covenant, Jeremiah prophesied that God would again send His presence upon sacrifices acceptable to him. 2 Macc. 2:1-8.

V. The precise phrasing of the institution narratives varies among the Eucharistic Prayers, but they all refer to the fact that it was the night before Jesus’s sacrifice on Calvary and to Jesus giving thanks and praise (*gratias*). They all use the same words in describing what Jesus said. This description of Jesus’ words at the Last Supper combines elements of the Gospels of Matthew, Mark, and Luke, as well as 1 Corinthians.

A. The words spoken over the bread combine the accounts of Matthew and Luke.

1. The words, “Take this, all of you and eat it” are closest to translation used in the Gospel according to Matthew. (Jesus would presumably have spoken in Hebrew or Aramaic, while the Gospels were written in Greek.) Matthew uses the words “all of you” in describing the consecration of the wine; the implication is that Jesus spoke these words also over the bread. There is a sense of the unity among all of the faithful that the Eucharist brings about.

2. The phrase “for this is My body which will be given up for you” are from the Gospel according to Luke, with similar words in 1 Corinthians.

- The word “for” that begins this phrase comes from the Latin word “enim,” which implies the conclusion of an argument or presentation. Part of the idea is that the sacrifice of Jesus Christ, the perfect argument for our salvation, is coming to a completion as we receive Him in the Eucharist.

- Jesus is giving His body for us in the perfect act of love.

B. The words spoken over the chalice are also taken from the Gospels of Matthew and Luke and the First Letter to the Corinthians.

1. The first phrase, “Take this all of you and drink from it” is from the Gospel according to Matthew. The description of the cup of His blood as “the new and eternal covenant” is basically in all of the accounts. The description of the covenant as new is in the Gospel according to Luke and 1 Corinthians. The description of the covenant as eternal indicates that this covenant, while new, fulfills the ancient promises of a covenant that would continue until the end of time. See, e.g., 1 Chron. 16:17; Ps. 105:10; Ezek. 16:60, 37:26; Heb. 13:20. The

idea is that the time of the old covenant with Israel has ended, or rather, been fulfilled, by the sacrifice of Jesus, in which we share through the Eucharist.

2. The prayer then continues by describing the blood of the chalice as being “poured out for you and for many for the forgiveness of sins.” The 2011 retranslation changed the word shed to “poured out” and the word all to many.

a. The term “poured out” better reflects the connection between the sacrifice on Calvary, in which the blood of Christ could be said to be either shed or poured out, with the Last Supper and the idea of wine generally, which is poured, not shed. In addition, there is a reference to the sacrificial offerings of the ancient Jews, the suffering of the just man in Psalm 22 (which Jesus quotes from the Cross) and the notion of the Spirit being poured forth upon the just. See Lev. 4:7, 8:14 (describing ritual purification with the blood of the sacrificed animals); Ps. 22:15; Is. 32:15 (the Spirit poured forth upon God’s people); Acts 10:45 (the Spirit poured out upon the Gentiles as well as Jews.)

b. The change from “for all” to “for you and for many” was significant enough that the Vatican Congregation for the Discipline of Divine Worship and Sacraments published an explanation in 2006.

- The Congregation explained that it is certainly true that Jesus did die for all people, citing in support of that proposition John 11:52; 2 Cor. 5:14-15; Titus 2:11; and 1 John 2:2. However, the Congregation also pointed out that the merits of Christ must be applied to each person, and that the person’s acceptance of those merits is essential. Thus, Christ died for all, but not all benefit from His death. See, e.g., Matt. 24:36-25:46; Luke 13:22-30; Gal 5:19-21; Rev. 20:11-15. Thus, from the standpoint of who benefits from the merits of Christ, He died for the many, but not all benefit. Thus, either formulation would be theologically correct. However, the institution narratives in the Gospels of Matthew and Mark specifically say “the many,” rather than “all” or “everyone.”

- Furthermore, Isaiah’s great prophesy about the suffering servant says that “Through His suffering, My servant will justify the many.” Is. 53:11. In this case, the many is not contrasting with all, but rather with the few. The idea is that salvation is not offered to the rare few, but to the many.

-Along similar lines, Plato in his classic *The Republic* adhered to a common view that there was a threefold division in humanity. He thought that the philosophers and other educated elite could be truly wise, the nobility and warrior class could share in some wisdom, and “the many” (*hoi polloi* in Greek) should be content with a lesser state. Here Jesus is saying that the glory of being

united with the Son of God is not reserved to the few elite, but to the many.

- In addition, the Eastern rites use the term “the many,” as the Latin rite has historically done, and current does in the original Latin. For these reasons, the Congregation thought it best to use the term “for many.”

3. The phrase “Do this in memory of Me” comes from the first letter to the Corinthians. The Gospel according to Luke includes Jesus’ use of that phrase over the bread. Jesus thus commanded that the Eucharist be celebrated continuously. In Jewish thought, the memory of a liturgy was not just recalling a past event, but the event very much becoming present to us here and now.

VI. The Eucharistic Prayers then end with the doxology, “Through Him, with Him, in Him, in the unity of the Holy Spirit, all glory and honor is 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.