

Preparation for the New Roman Missal – Part 4

Introduction: This insert is one of several that will explore the Liturgy of the Eucharist. Like the Liturgy of the Word which calls our attention on the Word of God in the Scriptures, the Liturgy of the Eucharist invites us to center our hearts on the altar. It begins with the Preparation of the Gifts and ends with our reception of Jesus in the sacrament of the Eucharist. In this insert we will review the Preparation of the Gifts and the format of the Eucharistic Prayer. It is important to remember that “Eucharist” means thanksgiving. In this part of the Mass we focus our awareness on gratitude to God for the gift of his Son – Jesus.

The Preparation of the Gifts begins the Liturgy of the Eucharist. We typically sing a hymn while our gifts are collected. The collection is to support the parish and all its ministries with special collections to help the missionary work of the church. The documents of Vatican Council II tell us that the Church exists to spread the Good News of the Gospel AND to care for those in need; it does not exist for itself! Our gifts, together with the gifts of bread and wine are brought to the altar where the priest praises God who has provided them. The prayer that the priest prays comes directly from the Hebrew prayer “*Berakha*” which is the same prayer that is used in Jewish homes to bless the bread and wine. Jesus used the prayers he knew at his Last Supper and we continue to use this ancient prayer. Although this prayer is short it reminds us that God provides these fruits of the earth for us through the work of those who plant, cultivate, harvest, bake or brew the wheat and grapes that make up our bread and wine. The earth and the ordinary work of human hands creates the gift that will become the extraordinary gift of God - the body and blood of Jesus. Our response to this prayer is: *Blessed be God forever.*

At the conclusion of this prayer, the priest invites us to **stand** and pray, saying, “Pray, brethren (brothers and sisters), that **my sacrifice and yours** may be acceptable to God, the almighty Father.” This is an expansion of “our sacrifice” and implies that the Mass is both one sacrifice offered by all of us together and a sacrifice that each of us as baptized members also offer as we all participate in the one sacrifice of Jesus Christ. We offer all that we are to God: our families and other relationships, our work and play, our joys and sufferings, our dreams and disappointments. We want to be transformed into Jesus so that we may become his hands and heart in the world around us.

Our response in the revised Mass changes by just one word. “Holy” recalls what we have just professed in our Creed – “I believe in one, *holy*, catholic and apostolic church.” We will **continue standing** as we respond.

	Current Text	New Text
<i>Suscipiat</i>	May the Lord accept the sacrifice	May the Lord accept the sacrifice at your
<i>Dominus</i>	at your hands	hands
	for the praise and glory of his name,	for the praise and glory of his name, for our
	for our good,	good
	and the good of all his Church.	and the good of all his holy Church.

The Eucharistic Prayer reminds us of who we are and to whom we belong and it invites us to become what we eat and drink – the Body and Blood of Christ! “The Eucharistic Prayer is the center and summit of the entire Mass. It is a prayer of thanksgiving and sanctification. The priest invites you to lift up your heart in prayer. You unite your thoughts with those expressed by the priest, who addresses God in the name of the entire community. The priest and the people all join themselves with Christ to proclaim the marvelous deeds of God.” (Understanding the Revised Mass Texts, p.26)

There are several Eucharistic Prayers and we are most familiar with four of them. The words of these prayers are prayed by the priest and there are many changes in the text of these prayers so we may see the priest referring to the Sacramentary more often until these prayers are committed to memory. All the Eucharistic Prayers have a similar format which, once we know it, will help us to better listen and understand whichever Eucharistic Prayer is being used.

Format of the Eucharistic Prayers:

Opening Dialogue - The prayer begins with an **Opening Dialogue** between the priest and the assembly where we lift our hearts to the Lord in prayer.

Thanksgiving - This is followed by a formal prayer of **Thanksgiving** called the Preface which gives God thanks and praise and usually has a theme that reflects the season or the feast.

Acclamation - We then join our voices in song with the choirs of angels as we sing the Holy, Holy, Holy. This **Acclamation** of praise to God comes from Isaiah 6:3 where the angels praise God and Matt 21:1-11 where the people praise Jesus, who comes in the name of the Lord.

Epiclesis - During the **Epiclesis** the priest asks the Holy Spirit to come down upon the bread and wine, and transform them into the Body and Blood of Christ.

Institution Narrative and Consecration - Next in the **Institution Narrative and**

Consecration, we hear the story of the Last Supper and the priest prays the solemn words of Jesus, "This is my Body", and "This is ...my Blood." Jesus asked us to do this in memory of him but as Catholics, we believe that this is not simply a memorial but rather that Christ is truly present in both the consecrated bread and wine which have become Jesus' Body and Blood. This is one of the most important mysteries of our faith.

In response to this wondrous gift we proclaim Jesus' death and resurrection until he comes again in our Memorial Acclamation.

Anamnesis - The priest repeats that same message immediately following our Memorial Acclamation.

Offering - In the **Offering** the priest once again offers the consecrated bread and wine, now the perfect self-offering of Jesus Christ to God.

Intercessions - The rest of the Eucharistic Prayer is filled with **Intercessions**. In a second Epiclesis we pray for the Holy Spirit to come down upon all of us and unite us as we prepare to receive Holy Communion. We include prayers for the living, the dead, for Christians and for all people.

Final Doxology - The Eucharistic Prayer concludes with the **Final Doxology** where the priest praises God the Father through, with and in Christ in the unity of the Holy Spirit. Our response, **the great "Amen"**, is one of the most important words at Mass. This is our "Yes"; we agree; we believe!!! Because the word is short, we often expand it musically by repeating it several times. In trying to explain what Amen means, "a child thought for a minute, and then compared it to email: 'It's like hitting, "Send,"'. We send our entire message all at once through the angelic Web server to the in-box of the one who rules over all." (Understanding the Revised Mass Texts, p.35)

In the Eucharistic Prayer, the new translation will affect what we hear more than what we say. At first this may be difficult but we should take it as a challenge and listen carefully to this most powerful prayer. Hopefully, we will grow in our ability to unite our minds and hearts with those of our entire community and with Christ, as we give thanks and praise to God.