Epiclesis

Epiclesis comes from the Greek word 'epiklesis' that means 'invocation' or, more literally, a 'calling-down'. The epiclesis is the request for the Holy Spirit's intercession in the Eucharistic Prayer, first to sanctify the gifts of bread and wine, and then to sanctify the gifts of the faithful. This makes special sense in that the sanctification of the faithful is one of the primary goals of the Eucharist. From the earliest of times, the prayers of thanksgiving have contained such an invocation under this title.

The epiclesis has two parts, the first before the consecration and the second, after.

The Missal for Mass uses the word 'epiclesis' for the moment that the bishop or priest celebrating Mass extends his hands over the offerings and asks God the Father to send the Holy Spirit on the gifts of bread and wine so that, through the power of the Spirit, they may become the Body and Blood of Christ. This same Spirit will transform those attending the liturgy that they may grow in their unity with each other, with the whole Church, and with Christ.
In the Roman Catholic Mass, it unfolds in two parts.



The first invocation culminates the offering we've prepared to be transformed into Our Lord. It is not just the offering of bread and wine; it is us (all our actions, not just moments of prayer that lead up to this moment, if they're focused on God). It is important to make note that these words are not consecratory—the Holy Spirit will render this offering suitable for the consecration. It is a type of preparation. The Words of Institution that follow the epiclesis are the consecration.

An example from the first portion of the epiclesis is *implicit* with the words from the Roman Canon (Eucharistic Prayer I):

> **Be pleased, O God, we pray, to bless, acknowledge, and approve this offering in every respect; make it spiritual and acceptable, so that it may become for us the Body and Blood of your most beloved Son, our Lord Jesus Christ.**

The epiclesis in Eucharistic Prayers II, III, and IV are much easier to identify; they *explicitly* invoke the Holy Spirit. For example, in EP II:

> **Make holy, therefore, these gifts, we pray by sending down your Spirit upon them like the dewfall, so that they may become for us the Body and Blood of our Lord Jesus Christ.**

The second part of the epiclesis occurs after the consecration. It is the prayer by which we ask the Holy Spirit to unify the faithful by their participation in this sacrament. In the Roman Canon (EP I) it is, again, *implicit*:

> **In humble prayer we ask you, almighty God: command that these gifts be borne by the hands of your holy Angel to your altar on high in the sight of your divine majesty, so that all of us, who through this participation at the altar receive the most holy Body and Blood of your Son, may be filled with every grace and heavenly blessing. (Through Christ our Lord. Amen.)**

While in the other Eucharistic Prayers it is *explicit*, for example in EP III:

> **Look, we pray, upon the oblation of your Church and, recognizing the sacrificial Victim by whose death you willed to reconcile us to yourself, grant that we, who are nourished by the Body and Blood of your Son and filled with his Holy Spirit, may become one body, one spirit in Christ.**

This "second epiclesis" is always oriented toward the unity of the faithful and culminates with the final doxology ("Through him, and with him, and in him, O God, almighty Father, in the unity of the Holy Spirit, all glory and honor is yours, for ever and ever").

Sources: USCCB; https://stcatherine.info/news/catholic-q-a-the-missal-and-sign-of-peace; https://rcspirituality.org/finding_the_plug/the-liturgy-of-the-eucharist-eucharistic-prayer-i-the-roman-canon-5/; https://www.ccwatershed.org/2013/07/10/what-epiclesis/