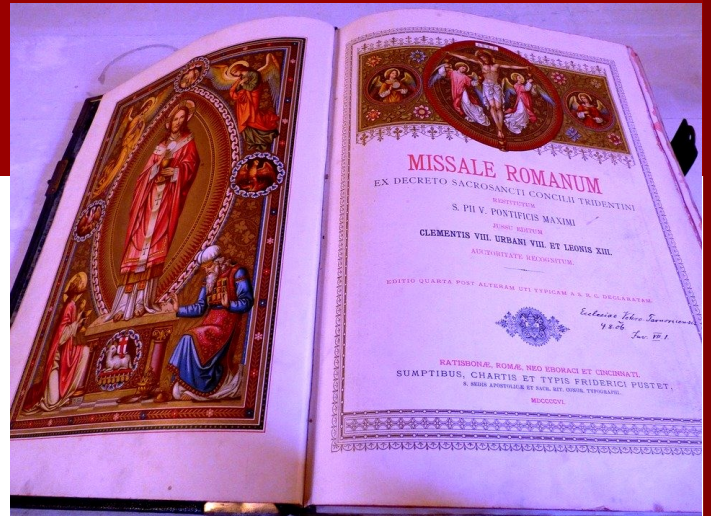


THE EUCHARISTIC PRAYER

The Eucharistic Prayer is the priestly prayer par excellence. The ordained priest, "acting in the person of Christ, brings about the Eucharistic Sacrifice and offers it to God in the name of all the people." The priest, who through receiving the sacrament of Holy Orders has been conformed to Christ the High Priest, acts and speaks as representing Christ the Head. It is for this reason, writes John Paul II in his Encyclical *Ecclesia de Eucharistia* that "the Roman Missal prescribes that only the priest should recite the Eucharistic Prayer, while the people participate in faith and in silence."



It is known in the Eastern tradition as Anaphora ("offering") and is indeed the "heart" and "culmination" of the celebration of the Mass.

In the Roman tradition, the Eucharistic prayer has been known as "Canon of the Mass" (Canon Missae), a term that is found in the early Sacramentaries and goes back at least to Pope Vigilius (537-555).

The Canon, one long prayer, has the form of thanksgiving (eucharistia), thus following the example of Christ himself at the Last Supper, when he took bread and wine and "gave thanks".

Essential elements

In the Preface, "the Church gives thanks to the Father, through Christ, in the Holy Spirit, for all his works: creation, redemption, and sanctification. The whole community thus joins in the unending praise that the Church in heaven, the angels and all the saints, sing to the thrice-holy God."

In the Epiclesis, the Church "asks the Father to send his Holy Spirit (or the power of his blessing) on the bread and wine, so that by his power they may become the body and blood of Jesus Christ and so that those who take part in the Eucharist may be one body and one spirit (some liturgical traditions put the epiclesis after the anamnesis)."

In the heart of the Eucharistic prayer, the Institution Narrative, "the power of the words and the action of Christ, and the power of the Holy Spirit, make sacramentally present under the species of bread and wine Christ's body and blood, his sacrifice offered on the cross once for all."

Then follows the Anamnesis, in which "the Church calls to mind the Passion, resurrection, and glorious return of Christ Jesus; she presents to the Father the offering of his Son which reconciles us with him."

In the Intercessions, "the Church indicates that the Eucharist is celebrated in communion with the whole Church in heaven and on earth, the living and the dead, and in communion with the pastors of the Church, the Pope, the diocesan bishop, his presbyterium and his deacons, and all the bishops of the whole world together with their Church."

The Roman Canon is the first of four Eucharistic Prayers. The new compositions contain elements both of the Latin and of the Eastern traditions. Subsequently, further Eucharistic Prayers have been added to the Missal.

The Canon Missae goes back to the second half of the fourth century, the period in which the Latin liturgy at Rome began to develop fully. In the oldest Roman tradition, the Canon begins with what we now call the "Preface," a solemn act of thanksgiving to God for his innumerable benefits, especially for his works of salvation. The Sanctus ('Holy, holy, holy') was introduced at a later stage and separated the Preface from the subsequent prayers. It is a characteristic of the Roman Rite that the text of the Preface varies according to the liturgical season or feast.

Source: www.vatican.va/news_services/liturgy/details/ns_lit_doc_20100316_sac-canone_en.html