**Lesson 9: The Liturgy of the Eucharist, Part I**

The Liturgy of the Eucharist is the pinnacle of the entire celebration of the Mass. The Liturgy of the Word forms us and moves us to celebrate and participate in the sacred action of Christ which brought about our salvation. Attention now focuses on the altar. The offerings are brought forward and the altar and offerings are prepared. The congregation is invited to join its offering with that of the priest who prays in the person of Christ and the Eucharistic Prayer with its three acclamations, the Sanctus, the Memorial Acclamation, and the Amen, is solemnly proclaimed. It is followed by the Communion Rite in which those who have offered Christ and, with Christ, themselves to the Father, now share in the sacred meal in which they feed on Christ’s Body and Blood. After a period of praise and thanksgiving the Liturgy of the Eucharist concludes with the Prayer after Communion.[[1]](#endnote-1)

At the Presentation of the Gifts, the vessels are brought to the altar by the servers and placed upon the altar. Members of the faithful bring forward the offerings of bread and wine, the physical substance of the sacrifice, together with the monetary gifts and, optionally on some occasions, food for the poor which represent the sacrifices of the faithful. The priest receives all of the gifts and places the gifts of bread and wine on the altar with prayers acknowledging them as gifts of God in which the work of human labor has played a part. The faithful are then invited to pray that the gifts, represented by the priest as “my sacrifice and yours”, will be acceptable to the Father. The rite concludes with the Prayer over the Offerings, which is similar in style to the Collect (Opening Prayer) of the Mass.[[2]](#endnote-2)

The Eucharistic Prayer then begins. It is the most solemn of all prayers in the Mass, “the center and summit of the entire celebration”.[[3]](#endnote-3) It begins with the Preface Dialogue which begins the Preface. This dialogue is an invitation by the priest asking the faithful to lift up their hearts and join him in giving thanks and praise to God. The Preface itself is an enumeration of some of the reasons that we have to thank the Lord which are often placed in the context of a liturgical season such as Advent, Christmas, Lent or Easter, or a feast of the Lord, of Mary or of one of the saints. While each Preface draws on many reasons to give thanks, the Preface always concludes with the greatest reason of all, the Father’s gift of his only Son whom he sent to save us from sin and to restore our relationship with him. The Preface concludes with the singing of the Sanctus (“Holy, Holy, Holy”). As the priest introduces this acclamation, he reminds us that our celebration is done in the company of all the angels and saints, the Church in heaven as well as the Church on earth. The Sanctus offers praise once again for the glory of the Lord, which fills the whole earth and anticipates the coming of the Savior with the words, “Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord…”[[4]](#endnote-4)

1. Sr. Janet Baxendale, SC, *A Walk through the Mass,* p. 9, taken from “Become One Body, One Spirit in Christ” CD resource (International Committee on English in the Liturgy, Inc. 2010). [↑](#endnote-ref-1)
2. Ibid. [↑](#endnote-ref-2)
3. General Instruction of the Roman Missal, no. 78, (United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, Washington, DC, 2003), from Baxendale, SC, *A Walk through the Mass*, p. 10. [↑](#endnote-ref-3)
4. Baxendale, SC, *A Walk through the Mass,* p. 10 [↑](#endnote-ref-4)