

The Eucharistic Prayer

The Eucharistic Prayer is the high point of the Mass (GIRM 78). We rarely if ever draw the faithful's attention to this prayer. In the form that it is prayed, it can be difficult for the faithful to be attentive. The hope of this series of homilies is that, with a deeper understanding of the Eucharistic Prayer, the faithful will be able to enter this experience more fully. With this understanding they will be prepared to offer themselves with Jesus to God the Father. Their encounter with the risen Christ will be deepened and their anticipation of communion enriched (GIRM 78).

The General Instruction also notes that the faithful are required to listen to the Eucharist Prayer with reverence and silence. Understanding the various aspects of the Eucharistic Prayer will increase their reverence. Though remaining silent they can nonetheless enter the vocal prayer of the priest with thoughtful and appropriate invocation that deepens their attentive listening. The model for this type of prayer is the rosary. The rosary is a meditation on the mysteries of Jesus' life. As we reflect on each mystery, we pray the Hail Marys. The Hail Mary prayer is not meant to be the focus. It means to serve as a sort of background chant to the meditation we are focused on. Properly done, the mystery stands out and the repetition of the Hail Mary allows us to enter more deeply in the mystery.

It can also be noted that even though the faithful do not pray the Eucharistic Prayer aloud with the priest, often they seem to be praying it quietly to themselves. Over time, listening to the Eucharist Prayers repeatedly, the faithful commit them to memory. Praying silently with the priest is their way of engaging in the prayer and no doubt helps avoid distraction. There might be an alternative to this practice that would allow the faithful to be even more attentive to the prayer and thus enter the sacrifice more completely.

Therefore, during the Eucharistic Prayer, as the faithful focus on words and their meaning prayed aloud by the presiding priest, they could in the silence of their minds and hearts, offer short acclamations. These are not said aloud but rather provide a focus for listening to the prayer. Of course, the faithful would need to understand the various aspects of the Eucharistic Prayer in order to know what sort of silent acclamation or prayer would be appropriate. This is possible with proper catechesis and practice. Those who have tried this way of entering the prayer have found that it enriches the prayer experience and allows them to listen more intently. This method will be explained in each of the elements of the Eucharistic Prayer.

The General Instruction of the Roman Missal speaks of eight elements of the Eucharistic Prayer. (GIRM 79). How these elements are present in Eucharistic Prayers I, II and III are outlined in the following pages. It would be helpful to have these prayers present as the next section is studied.

- a.) **Thanksgiving** is the first element. It is expressed primarily in the Preface. The priest vocalizes for the people the marvelous works of God. Several prefaces speak to a particular aspect of the work of salvation. While the priest is vocalizing this element of the Eucharistic Prayer, the faithful, if they are aware of these moments of thanksgiving, could silently say, "Thank you Father."
- b.) The **Acclamations** occur three times in the Eucharistic Prayer, the Holy, Holy, Holy, the Memorial Acclamation and the Great Amen. These are intended to be sung by the whole congregations. They are shouts of joy and gladness. We are joining the whole Church, on earth and in heaven, praising God for his gracious kindness toward us.

- c.) The ***Epiclesis*** is the element of the Eucharistic Prayer in which we call down the Holy Spirit. The Greek word means “to call down.” It is the Holy Spirit who effects and changes. With hand laid on the gifts of bread and wine, the priest invokes the Holy Spirit aloud to transform these gifts into the Body and Blood of Christ. After the consecration has occurred, the priest also invokes the Holy Spirit to transform us, the faithful, that we will become one body and spirit in the Risen Lord. During these moments of invocation, the faithful could silently join the prayer by saying, “Come Holy Spirit.”
- d.) The ***Institution Narrative and Consecration*** is the element of the Eucharistic Prayer most familiar to the faithful. In this moment, we remember with words and gestures the great gift Jesus gave us at the Last Supper. It is the supreme moment of thanksgiving as we recall God’s gift of his Son and Jesus’ gift of himself in his Body and Blood. We also hear the commandment to “Do this in memory of me.” During this moment, we believe the bread and wine become the Body and Blood of Christ. This is the moment of hearing the greatest story of our salvation.
During this element in the Eucharistic Prayer, the faithful quiet their minds and hearts. Attention is the only proper response.
- e.) The ***Anamnesis*** follows closely on the institution narrative and consecration. The Greek word means “to remember.” We have listened to and remember the great moment of the Last Supper when Jesus gave himself to us as food from heaven. We continue to call to mind, not only that, but also the whole of His life and especially His resurrection, His ascension and the promise of His return in glory. The words prayed by the priest continue the remembering that Jesus asked us to do in the Last Supper. This element of the Eucharistic Prayer is followed closely by the oblation.
- f.) The ***Oblation*** is the actual offertory of the Mass. At this moment, we the faithful, the whole Church, offer the unblemished sacrificial Victim, Jesus, in the Holy Spirit, whom we have invoked and who is present, to God the Father. Not only that, but we also learn to offer ourselves. In this moment, we are brought through, with and in Christ into unity with God and each other. During the Anamnesis and the oblation, the faithful could well be praying silently, “Accept us Father, with your Son Jesus,” or any words that would signify our desire to united in the life of the Trinity.
- g.) The ***Intercessions*** follow. We believe the whole Church is present with us in this moment. We also believe God is present and we know that when God is present, he pours out his blessings on his people. Therefore, we ask God to bless with the things we need. We pray for the Church, its leaders, for the living and the dead and for peace in the world. During this element of the Eucharistic Prayer, the faithful can imitate, though silently, the response to the Universal Prayer by praying “Lord hear our prayer.”
- h.) The ***Concluding Doxology*** brings the Eucharistic Prayer to a close. We have remembered and offered thanks. We have invoked the Holy Spirit who has come. The bread and wine are transformed, and we have joined in the great sacrifice of Jesus to God the Father. Finally, but not least, we have asked with confidence for what we need. The whole prayer and every element of the prayer is summed up in this moment. All that we have prayed is through Christ, and with Christ and in Christ. We offer praise and thanks to God. The Amen, really should be a shout of joy and victory that the whole faithful gathered acclaims.

Note: These are taken from the Year of the Eucharist teachings. More information can be found at <https://www.rapidcitydiocese.org/year-of-eucharist/>.