



IX

Liturgy of the Eucharist

The celebration of the memorial of the Lord is at the center of our life as individual persons and as family members. It is the starting point of our understanding of the Eucharist and the inspiration of our prayer and commitment.

Rule of Life for Associates (ROLA), 7a

**Associates of the
Blessed Sacrament
Initial Formation Program**

Liturgy of the Eucharist

1. Opening Prayer

(The prayer is taken from the Roman Missal, Eucharistic Prayer IV.

The group may want to alternate stanzas or have each person take a stanza to pray.)

It is truly right to give you thanks, truly just to give you glory,
Father, most holy, for you are the one God living and true,
existing before all ages and abiding for all eternity,
dwelling in unapproachable light.

Yet you, who alone are good, the source of life, have made all that is,
so that you might fill your creatures with blessings
and bring joy to many of them by the glory of your light.

And so, in your presence are countless hosts of Angels,
who serve you day and night and, gazing upon the glory of your face,
glorify you without ceasing.
With them we, too, confess your name in exultation,
giving voice to every creature under heaven.

We give you praise, Father most holy, for you are great,
and you have fashioned all your works in wisdom and in love.
You formed man in your own image and entrusted the whole world to
his care,
so that in serving you alone, the Creator,
he might have dominion over all creatures.

And when through disobedience he had lost your friendship,
you did not abandon him to the domain of death.
For you came in mercy to the aid of all, so that those who seek might
find you.

Time and again you offered them covenants
 and through the prophets taught them to look forward to salvation.
 And you so loved the world,
 Father most holy, that in the fullness of time
 you sent your Only Begotten Son to be our Savior.

Made incarnate by the Holy Spirit and born of the Virgin Mary,
 he shared our human nature in all things but sin.
 To the poor he proclaimed the good news of salvation,
 to prisoners, freedom, and to the sorrowful of heart, joy.

To accomplish your plan, he gave himself up to death,
 and, rising from the dead, he destroyed death and restored life.
 And that we might live no longer for ourselves
 but for him who died and rose again for us.

He sent the Holy Spirit from you, Father,
 as the first fruits for those who believe,
 so that, bringing to perfection his work in the world,
 he might sanctify creation to the full.

Therefore, O Lord, we pray: may this same Holy Spirit
 graciously sanctify these offerings,
 that they may become the body and blood of our Lord Jesus Christ
 for the celebration of this great mystery,
 which he himself left us as an eternal covenant.

For when the hour had come for him to be glorified by you,
 Father most holy,
 having loved his own who were in the world,
 he loved them to the end:
 and while they were at supper
 he took bread, blessed and broke it and gave it to his disciples.

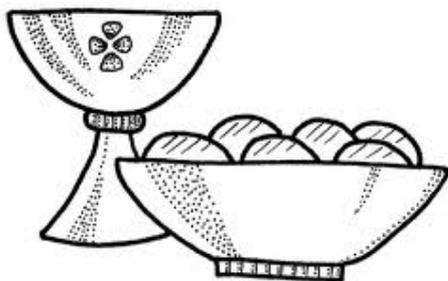
In a similar way, taking the chalice filled with the fruit of the vine,
 he gave thanks, and gave the chalice to his disciples.

2. Introduction to the Theme

Vatican II's *Sacramentum Concilium* (Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy, COSL) informs those presiding at Mass that “more is required than the mere observance of the laws governing valid and licit celebration; it is their duty also to ensure that the faithful take part fully aware of what they are doing, actively engaged in the rite, and enriched by its effects.” (11)

Father Paul Bernier, SSS, reminds us that Vatican II stated that the “sacraments are liturgical actions, not things,” and suggests to us in his book, *Eucharist: Celebrating Its Rhythms in Our Lives* (18) that the council laid out a new vision for the celebration of the Eucharist by stating that “the full and active participation of all the people is the aim to be considered before all else.” (COSL, No. 14) An earlier translation by Walter Abbot phrased it in this way: “. . . that the faithful take part knowingly, actively, and fruitfully.”

The Mass contains many elements to engage our whole selves – our minds, spirit and body (senses): gestures, song, touch, words, moments of intentional silence, objects/icons to the sacred, the use of food (bread and wine) and more. Our church documents repeatedly call for us, and forcefully challenge us, to bring our whole body into worship and allow God to engage our minds and hearts so that we are “alive with the Spirit of God to fully participate and be present.”



3. Eymard . . . *In His Own Words*

“Nourish yourself on our Lord, on his spirit, his virtues, his evangelical truth, on the contemplation of his mysteries. Do not leave him. He said, ‘If you abide in me and my words abide in you, everything that you want will be done.’”

To Edmee Brenier De Montmorand
May 19, 1868

“A master feeds his servant: so receive Communion every day. Imagine how hard your work would be if you did not eat the bread of life! Eat in order to be able to work . . . Give him the glory of everything . . . I bless you very eucharistically in our Lord.”

To Miss Adele Martel,
May 29, 1868.

4. Bible Text

Jesus said, “The hour is coming, and is now here, when true worshipers will worship the Father in Spirit and truth; and indeed the Father seeks such people to worship him. God is Spirit, and those who worship him must worship in Spirit and truth.”

John 4:23-26, NAB

6. Teaching – drawing on the following reading

- Excerpt from Chapter 5: Liturgy of the Eucharist from *Eucharist: Basic Spirituality* by Father Frank O’Dea, SSS (Edited by Father William Fickel, SSS)

Liturgy of the Eucharist – Key Points

- The celebration of the eucharistic liturgy is the central action of the church’s mission in the world. The energy and attention given over to the full and active participation of all the worshippers in this prayer serves as the foundation for all of the other charitable and apostolic work in which the church engages. It is the Eucharistic Prayer which informs, inspires and nourishes the church’s work in the world. Our participation – whether as lay or ordained – is a joining in the death and resurrection of Christ in his unique memorial offered on the night he was betrayed. All are one in the body of Christ at the altar.
- In the remembering of Christ’s death and resurrection at the Eucharist, we identify ourselves with Christ and are taken into his death, to be raised up with him in his resurrection. It is by entering into this mystery of faith we discover, as followers of Jesus, our true identities, as our interior selves are filled with grace. The Eucharistic Prayer helps to build our relationship with God, with each other and with our own selves.
- The elements of the earth, our food and drink, are gifts from God and the people, and placed on the altar, to be sanctified by the Holy Spirit, imbued with the memory of Jesus’ free acceptance of his death and resurrection. This paschal sacrifice invites all people to be united in the offering of their own lives in union with the obedience of Christ to the will of the Father for the transformation of the world.

Reading

THE EUCHARISTIC PRAYER

There is now a wonderful variety of Eucharistic Prayers: the four that were introduced originally with the reform of the liturgy after Vatican II, three for children, two for reconciliation, and one for Various Needs and Occasions which has four variations. It pays to be as attentive as possible to these words since they contain rich teachings for our spiritual journey. All the prayers have the following common divisions but with different wording.

PREFACE

The Eucharistic Prayer (sometimes called the “*anaphora*”) is the central part of the Mass. It corresponds to the action of Jesus at the Last Supper, when “he gave thanks” over the bread and wine. The dialogue encourages us to lift our hearts to the Lord and to give thanks to God. In fact, the very word “Eucharist” means “thanksgiving” and this is one of the key feelings expressed in the ritual: thanksgiving for all that God does for us, especially for the gift of Jesus his Son. We can add our own reasons for thanking God: for good health, financial security, freedom from terrorism, a democratic way of life, education, family life, good relationships, and so on.

Most prefaces begin: “*It is truly right and just, our duty and our salvation, always and everywhere to give you thanks, Lord, holy Father, almighty and eternal God, through Christ our Lord.*” As used in the liturgy, “preface” does not mean some kind of introduction as in the preface of a book. “Praefatio” means a proclamation *before* the assembly, that is, in the presence of the assembly, and given in a “high” tone. Sometimes it was used as the whole Eucharistic Prayer which originally was not split by the “Holy, Holy, Holy...”

CALLING ON THE HOLY SPIRIT

There is an invocation to the Holy Spirit to transform the bread and wine into the body and blood of Christ. For those interested in technical language this prayer is called the “*epiclesis*.” Activities that are outside the internal workings of the Trinity such as the creation of the world or sanctification of individuals, are attributed to the Holy Spirit, so the transformation of bread and wine into the body and blood of Christ is a work of the Holy Spirit. Eucharistic Prayer II calls on the Holy Spirit in this way: “*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.”

As the priest says these words he holds his hands over the bread and wine to symbolize the coming of the Holy Spirit, the same gesture that is used for confirmation, holy orders and anointing of the sick.

Note that it is not the gesture that brings about the change in the bread and wine. To attribute the change to the gesture would be to believe in magic. It is the power of the Holy Spirit that brings about the change. The gesture is the outward sign of the coming of the Holy Spirit. Note also that I'm not saying the change takes place *at that moment*. Rather, it's at this point that the liturgy recognizes the action of the Holy Spirit throughout the Eucharistic prayer.

THE STORY OF THE LAST SUPPER

We hear the narrative of the Last Supper when we celebrate Eucharist. The story forms part of every current Eucharistic Prayer in the Western church and helps us to understand the Eucharist. As the name implies this was the final meal of many that Jesus had with his friends. Jesus knew it was his farewell meal, though the disciples were not aware of this.

The Gospels make it clear that Jesus took a lot of care in preparing this meal because it became the launching pad for the most important spiritual action of the community that he would leave behind. Following his example, let us carefully prepare our hearts and minds well for this awesome mystery.

For the purposes of this commentary, let's use the story of the institution of the Eucharist as it is given in Eucharistic Prayer II: *“At the time he was betrayed and entered willingly into his passion, he took bread and, giving thanks, broke it, and gave it to his disciples, saying: ‘Take this all of you and eat of it: for this is my body which will be given up for you.’”*

Following Jesus' instruction the disciples each took a portion of the bread and consumed it. By this action, Jesus showed that just as this bread was being taken, eaten, chewed up, so his body would be taken and disposed of. This happened the following day when his body was nailed to a cross and Jesus died. At the Last Supper, Jesus prefigured this total gift of himself by identifying himself with the bread that was given out and eaten.

SIGNIFICANCE OF THE CUP

At the end of the meal, Jesus departed from tradition in a radical way. He took a cup of wine and said: “*Take this, all of you, and drink from it: for this is the chalice of my blood, the blood of the new and eternal covenant, which will be poured out for you and for many for the forgiveness of sin. Do this in memory of me.*” Jesus was offering himself totally for us in the complete gift of himself, holding nothing back. Having loved his own who were in the world, he loved them to the end. (John 13:1)

This totality of offering can be described as follows: “Thus the sacramental symbolism signifies precisely the *totality of Christ*, giving himself, and the *totality of the gift* of himself he thus presents to us. The glorified Christ gives himself completely in the Eucharist of history. Completely: *body and blood*. It is thus that Christ gives himself in his entirety, as he makes a fragment of the world into an expression of his person.” (Gustave Martelet, translated by Rene Hague, *The Risen Christ and the Eucharistic World*, William Collins, London, 1973, p.177.)

Each of those at the table drank from the chalice that Jesus offered them; this drinking from the chalice symbolized in advance the pouring out of his blood. Eating the bread and drinking from the chalice was a prophecy in action, a gesture much more powerful than any number of words of explanation or theology.

In instituting it (the Eucharist), he (Jesus) did not merely say, “This is my body,” “this is my blood,” but went on to add: “which is given for you” “which is poured out for you” (Luke 22:19-20). Jesus did not simply state that what he was giving them to eat and drink was his body and blood; he also expressed its sacrificial meaning and made sacramentally present his sacrifice which would soon be offered on the Cross for the salvation of all. (Saint John Paul II, encyclical letter *Ecclesia de Eucharistia*, 12, 2003)

The action of drinking from Jesus’ own chalice was most unusual as each of those at a Paschal meal had his or her own chalice and usually there was no sharing of a chalice. Why did Jesus get each of those present to drink from his chalice? Perhaps it was an invitation to them to share in his impending suffering. Why say this? When James and John asked Jesus for places at his right hand and left in his glory (Mark 10:35 – 40), Jesus said to them, “*Are you able to drink the chalice that I drink, or be*

baptized with the baptism that I am baptized with?”

Jesus was obviously challenging these two followers to something very difficult. Immediately after the Last Supper, Jesus went to the garden of Gethsemane with the same two disciples plus Peter. (Mark 14:32 – 42) Mark tells us, “he ... began to be distressed and agitated. And he said to them, I am deeply grieved, even to death; remain here and keep awake.” He went on a little further and prayed, “Abba, Father, for you all things are possible; remove *this chalice* from me; yet not what I want but what you want.”

These two passages indicate that in this case the chalice of wine was not a symbol of joy as it would usually be, but more like a chalice of bitter medicine that must be taken. In the garden, Jesus was disappointed that his friends could not stay awake and pray with him in his agony. Could you not keep awake one hour? (Mark 14:37) Jesus’ human nature is well displayed here. He knew his suffering and death were rapidly approaching and his human nature shrank from the impending agony.

At the meal, he may have felt desperate for some company in his hour of distress, so the sharing of his own cup with the others may have been his way of encouraging them to share his suffering. But to his dismay the disciples were not up to the challenge. In the garden they slept, and when Jesus was arrested shortly after, all the disciples abandoned him.

When we take the chalice of wine at the Eucharist, we have the opportunity to share Jesus’ pain. Father Anthony McSweeney, SSS, writes very poignantly:

As we are handed the chalice we may think of Jesus asking us, “Can you drink the chalice that I must drink? Are you willing to share in my lot or destiny, especially in so much as it entails suffering accepted as a covenant offering? Are you willing to accept your lot as I have accepted mine in trusting abandonment to the Father and in love for your fellow human beings? If you are, I will transform the chalice of your pain into a chalice of blessing, of overflowing life. This is the chalice of the covenant that I offer to you today. It is also the chalice of promise, my assurance that you too will drink the new wine of spirit-existence with me at my Father’s table in the Kingdom”. (McSweeney, *Together*, 76, June 2002, 62)

It hurts when you are snubbed by a friend; it's agonizing when your spouse walks out on you, it's frustrating when you are overlooked again for promotion. When these painful events occur, you put them into the bitter chalice in your imagination and incorporate your personal pain with the pain that Jesus endured. Jesus' suffering is the archetypal suffering of all humankind and includes all the suffering of every person on earth. It is for each of us to consciously insert into Jesus' sufferings our own hurts each time we attend the Eucharist.

The reintroduction of the chalice for the use of the laity is a wonderful blessing, an opportunity not to be missed, a chance to be more in tune with the saving action of Jesus. Here's a wonderful witness to the importance of taking the wine: *"By being alert to the significance of the chalice our spirituality is strengthened; we become more aware that Eucharistic spirituality can embrace the pains and hurts of life and can help us to integrate these into our lives in ways that make sense."*

The Last Supper narrative is the story of Jesus giving himself in love. His self-offering is demonstrated clearly and vividly in the prophetic action of likening his offering of himself in love to bread being eaten and wine being drunk. Jesus goes on to say the pouring out of his blood seals a new covenant between the Father and us, a *"new and eternal covenant."*

"Do this in memory of me" is telling us that we are to repeat this prophetic action as the most effective way of remembering Jesus' self-offering, his extraordinary love for us in being prepared to surrender his life *"for the forgiveness of sins."*

MEMORIAL

The emphasis on remembering the death and resurrection continues in the next part of the Eucharistic Prayer which is technically called the *anamnesis* (its opposite is amnesia). This remembering is not just a thinking back to an event of two thousand years ago. The Eucharist brings that event into the present moment. The Eucharist has something of the time machine element to it. We can think of the death and resurrection being brought to us in the time machine or the time machine taking us back to Calvary and the tomb. This is one of the great mysteries of the Eucharist: the collapse of time. The death and resurrection of Jesus are as real to us as if we were actually present when Jesus died and when he was raised into a new life.

This is a very important part of the spirituality of the Eucharist. It helps us to think about our own dying to self-centeredness and rising into a new life more centered on others as Jesus did. To celebrate the Eucharist in any meaningful way we must be attuned to this aspect of the mystery.

THE OFFERING

We then offer to the Father the body and blood of Jesus. Usually, the prayer also uses the word “sacrifice” at this time. This word comes from the Latin “sacrum facere,” which means to make sacred. We have taken ordinary bread and wine and by the power of the Holy Spirit whose help we invoked earlier (remember the *epiclesis*?) they have become more than just bread and wine. They have taken on a presence of the risen Christ, and we now offer them to the Father just as Jesus offered himself to the Father during his lifetime. I seek to do not my own will but the will of him who sent me. (John 5:30)

As he was dying on the cross Jesus said: “Father, into your hands I commend my spirit” (Luke 23:46). This offering continues the identification of the Eucharist with the death and resurrection of Jesus and inspires us to apply this theme to our own lives. *A genuine spirituality must encourage us to die to self and live for others.*

INTERCESSIONS

We then turn to God for our needs, particularly the needs of the church, naming the pope and the local bishop as a special focus of our prayer. A prayer that touches my heart particularly is the one in the Eucharistic Prayer for use in Masses for Various Needs III which says: *“Keep us attentive to the needs of all that, sharing their grief and pain, we may faithfully bring them the good news of salvation and go forward with them along the way of your kingdom.”*

Without giving away what is essential, we must be open to changing our practices as the world around us changes so rapidly. Without appropriate change, the church is at risk of being irrelevant to the lives of many people. I like the extension of this theme in Eucharistic Prayer IV which adds: *“Remember ... all those who seek you with a sincere heart.”* The Eucharist embraces all people in its loving arms.

Sometimes the prayer invokes the Holy Spirit in a kind of second “*epiclesis*” as in Eucharistic Prayer IV: *“Look, O Lord, upon the sacrifice which you*

yourself have provided for your church, and grant in your loving kindness to all who partake of this one bread and one chalice that, gathered into one body by the Holy Spirit, they may truly become a living sacrifice in Christ to the praise of your glory.”

Eucharistic Prayer of Reconciliation I prays for the unity of the church: *“Look kindly, most compassionate Father, on those you unite to yourself by the sacrifice of your Son, and grant that, by the power of the Holy Spirit, as they partake of this one bread and one chalice, they may be gathered into one body in Christ, who heals every division.”*

We also remember those who have died as they are an important part of the communion of Jesus’ followers. We make no judgment on them, leaving that to God. The prayer from the Masses for Various Needs expresses this very beautifully: *“Be mindful of our brothers and sisters (we can insert names) who have fallen asleep in the peace of Christ and all the dead whose faith only you alone have known. Admit them to rejoice in the light of your face, and in the resurrection give them the fullness of life.”*

Finally, we pray for ourselves. The prayers focus on asking God to ensure we become members of the community of the saints and the angels in the next world praising God in his glory. Most of the prayers name Mary as one whose company we would particularly like to share.

DOXOLOGY

This central prayer of the Eucharist comes to a grand conclusion praising Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. It is called the “doxology,” and it is fitting that this prayer concludes with praise of the Trinity, the ultimate goal of our worship. As the priest recites this prayer, he holds up high the bread and the wine. The gesture is very important.

At the Eucharist, the lifting up of the bread and wine may be seen as a symbol of the victory of Christ over sin and death and a spiritualization of our gifts, an ascent to the Father. It is a moment of jubilation and it is very appropriate for the presider to sing it and the people to sing the “Amen” with enthusiasm.

The Eucharistic Prayer is the living and pulsing heart of the Mass. The challenge is to listen attentively and respond enthusiastically not just with our minds but with our hearts so that we are participating “fully, consciously and actively.”

7. Closing Prayer (Continuation of Eucharistic Prayer IV)

Therefore, O Lord, as we now celebrate the memorial of our redemption, we remember Christ's death and his descent to the realm of the dead; we proclaim his resurrection and his ascension to your right hand; and as we await his coming in glory, we offer you his body and blood, the sacrifice acceptable to you which brings salvation to the whole world.

Look, O Lord, upon the sacrifice which you yourself have provided for your Church,
and grant in your loving kindness to all
who partake of this one bread and one chalice that,
gathered into one body by the Holy Spirit,
they may truly become a living sacrifice in Christ to the praise of your glory.

Therefore, Lord, remember now all for whom we make this sacrifice:
especially your servant, (name) our pope, our bishop, and the whole order
of bishops,
all the clergy, those who take part in this offering, those gathered here
before you,
your entire people, and all who seek you with a sincere heart.

Remember also those who have died in the peace of your Christ
and all the dead, whose faith you alone have known.

To all of us, your children, grant, O merciful Father,
that we may enter into a heavenly inheritance
with the blessed Virgin Mary, Mother of God,
and with your apostles and saints in your kingdom.

There, with the whole of creation, freed from the corruption
of sin and death,
may we glorify you through Christ our Lord,
through whom you bestow on the world all that is good.

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. Amen.

8. Additional Reading Material

- McSweeney, Anthony, SSS. *Lift Up Your Hearts: Eucharist and the Eucharistic Prayer, Manna I.*
- Lane, John Thomas, SSS. *Eucharist and the Elements of Celebration, Manna III.*
- Nogosek, Robert, CSC. *Fruitful Participation in the Eucharist, Emmanuel Magazine, March/April 2011.*
- Bernier, Paul, SSS. *Changing Eucharistic Perspectives, Emmanuel Magazine, July/August 2006.*

Note to Animator: Please have copies of the Christian Prayer book for the next meeting

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