

The Eucharistic Prayer



The Eucharistic Prayer is the source and summit of the Mass, just as the Eucharistic sacrifice is the source and summit of the whole Christian life. Most Catholics learn at an early age that it is during the Eucharistic Prayer that our gifts of bread and wine become the Body and Blood of Christ. We call this action the consecration and this change of the elements transubstantiation. The words Jesus spoke at the Last Supper when he took bread into his hands and said, “This is my body,” and over the cup, “This is my blood,” embody what we, as Catholics, believe occurs at Mass. What we have not always appreciated is the full context of the Eucharistic Prayer and the depth of its meaning.

In the Eucharistic Prayer, we give thanks and praise to God. We remember and, by the power of the Holy Spirit, make present the saving life, death, and resurrection of Jesus. We offer Jesus’ sacrifice to the Father and join ourselves to him in this solemn offering. We ask the Holy Spirit to transform our offering and make us one in Christ with all those mentioned in the Eucharistic Prayer.

We Remember in Thanksgiving

We come to the altar with praise and thanksgiving for the work of God’s creation and for the redemption won for us by Jesus Christ. Most especially we remember Christ’s becoming man, his preaching and teaching, his passion, death, and resurrection. In this memorial act, these sacred events become present and real in a special way.

In the Eucharist we meet and enter into the one sacrifice of Christ. Christ has died and risen once, for all time, and so this memorial does not add to Christ’s sacrifice; nor does it multiply it. Rather, in the celebration of the Eucharist, Christ makes his sacrificial death and his resurrection sacramentally present to us in an un-bloody manner. It is a memorial celebration, so that, as Saint Paul says, “every time, then, you eat this bread and drink this cup, you proclaim the death of the Lord until he comes!”

(1 Corinthians 11:26)

We Offer Sacrifice

Christ emptied himself for our salvation. “The gift of his love and obedience to the point of giving his life (see John 10:17–18) is in the first place a gift to his Father” (Pope John Paul II, *Ecclesia de Eucharistia*, #13). Christ invites us to join ourselves to him in this offering to the Father so that his sacrifice will include our own.

Through the action of the priest Christ is both the one who offers and the one who is offered. The gifts of bread and wine that we carry to the altar are symbols of all in our lives that we bring to the altar.

We Join the Eucharistic Prayer

When the Church celebrates the Eucharist, the memorial of her Lord’s death and resurrection, this central event of salvation becomes really present and the “work of our redemption is carried out.” (Pope John Paul II, *Ecclesia de Eucharistia*, #11) It is Christ himself, the eternal high priest of the New Covenant who, acting through the ministry of the priests, offers the Eucharistic sacrifice. And it is the same Christ, really present under the species of bread and wine, who is the offering of the Eucharistic sacrifice. (Catechism of the Catholic Church, #1410)

We join our work, sufferings and successes, joys and burdens to Christ’s sacrifice so that our lives may be offered

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and transformed. When the priest prays “Let your Spirit come upon these gifts to make them holy. . . .” we are not only asking that this bread and wine be transformed into the Body and Blood of Christ, but also that our lives will be changed and given new meaning, new value.

Real Presence for Eternal Life

The Church partakes most intimately in Christ’s sacrifice when she receives the Eucharist. “We receive the very One who offered himself for us, we receive his body which he gave up for us on the Cross and his blood which he ‘poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins’ (Matthew 26:28).” (Pope John Paul II, *Ecclesia de Eucharistia*, #16)

Our eating and drinking at the Lord’s Table assures us of eternal life, for the food that we share is truly the real body of Christ. When some quarreled about how Jesus could give them his flesh to eat, Jesus firmly responded: “Unless you eat of the flesh of the Son of Man and drink his blood, you do not have life within you. Whoever eats my flesh and drinks my blood has eternal life and I will raise him on the last day” (John 6:53–54). Our celebration of the Eucharist then points us to the future, giving us a glimpse of heaven on earth.

The names of the saints in the Eucharistic Prayer remind us that the Church in heaven and the Church on earth are one around the altar. We are given hope for a new world today and a glorious future when Christ will come again in glory.



One Body, One Spirit in Christ

In the Eucharistic Prayer, we pray that our communion will fulfill the desire of Jesus when he prayed to his Father: “so that they may all be one, as you, Father, are in me and I in you, that they also may be in us, that the world may believe that you sent me” (John 17:21).

The words of the Third Eucharistic Prayer echo Jesus’ prayer to the Father: “Grant that we who are nourished by his body and blood may be filled with his Holy Spirit, and become one body, one spirit in Christ.”

The bond of unity that the Eucharist creates is so unique and so essential to the Christian life that we can rightly say that the Eucharist makes the Church (see *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, #1396).

Amen

The Eucharistic Prayer ends with the assembly’s Great Amen. Our Amen should be the most robust acclamation we make at Mass, for it is our “yes,” our “so be it,” to the entire prayer proclaimed by the priest on our behalf. By our Amen we make the sacrifice enacted at the altar our own. Not only do we say that it is the Church that celebrates the Eucharist, we believe that the celebration of the Eucharist also makes the Church.

Although we are already one in Christ through Baptism, Eucharistic “Communion renews, strengthens, and deepens this incorporation into the Church, already achieved by Baptism. In Baptism we have been called to form but one body. The Eucharist fulfills this call.” (*Catechism of the Catholic Church*, #1396).

We participate in the Eucharistic Prayer by:

- Our attention and posture.
- Joining our lives to the sacrifice of Christ.
- Making the responses:
Holy, Holy,
Memorial Acclamation,
Great Amen.