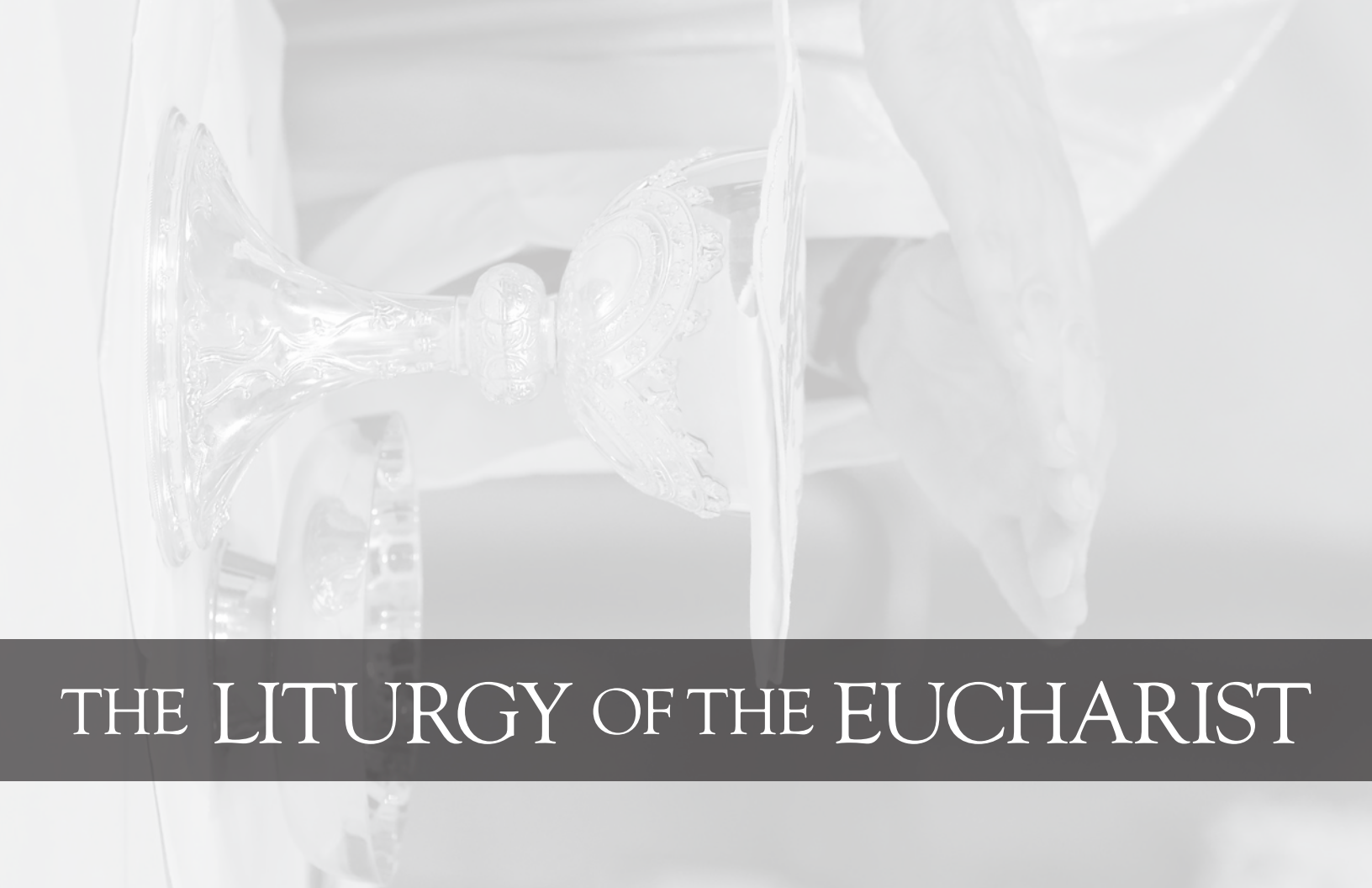

THE LITURGY OF THE EUCHARIST

In the second half of the Mass, called the Liturgy of the Eucharist, Jesus' sacrifice on the Cross is made present by the priest, who carries out what Jesus did at the Last Supper and what he commanded the apostles to do in his memory. In the Liturgy of the Eucharist, bread and wine are offered as gifts by the people and then consecrated and changed into the Body and Blood of Christ, which we receive in Holy Communion. We will consider this section of the Mass in its three principal parts: (1) the Preparation of the Gifts, (2) the Eucharistic Prayer, and (3) the Communion Rite.

The PREPARATION of the GIFTS

The presentation of the gifts in the Liturgy has its roots in the early Church. Already in AD 155, St. Justin Martyr mentioned the custom of someone bringing bread and wine to the priest after the prayers of intercession (see CCC 1345). In the third century, St. Hippolytus noted the practice as well.[60] As the ritual developed, the faithful or a representative would process toward the altar to present a wide range of gifts in addition to bread and wine, such as oil, honey, wool, fruit, wax, or flowers. The bread and wine were used in the Eucharistic Liturgy, while other gifts were given to support the priests or to serve the poor.

This part of the Mass has also been known as the Offertory, based on the Latin word *offerre*, which means "to present, to bring, or to offer." Though it is now also called the Preparation of the Gifts, sacrificial themes remain. Indeed, there was much significance in the offering of these gifts, for they typically came from one's home or field and were made by one's hand. As such, they expressed a gift of one's self. Indeed, to part with the fruit of one's own hard labor would have had sacrificial overtones. This is why the presentation of the gifts symbolizes the individual's giving of himself to God.

14. The Presentation of the Gifts

We might not see a lot in the bread and wine that are taken in procession to the altar and given to the priest. We might even be tempted to view this part of the Mass as halftime—a break in the action, time we can tune out for a bit.

But we don't want to miss out on the spiritual treasures awaiting us in this ancient ritual. For this is the beginning of the most important part of the Mass, the Liturgy of the Eucharist. And what is being presented to almighty God in the hands of the priest is not just bread, wine, and a basket of money. For these humble gifts symbolize our entire lives—our works, our joys, our sufferings, all that we do and all that we are. In the presentation of the gifts, God is giving us each an opportunity to offer him our heart, mind, and soul as a gift of love. Do you want to unite your heart—your entire life—with the presentation of the gifts at every Mass? Let us take a look at the profound biblical symbolism of this ritual so we can participate in it with all our hearts.

Bread and Wine

The offering of bread and wine in the Mass has deep roots in Scripture. In addition to being used in the Passover of Jesus' day and in the Last

Supper, bread and wine were offered up regularly in Israel's sacrificial rites. Consider the symbolism of bread and wine and what it would have meant to offer these gifts to God.

In the Bible, bread was not merely a side dish to a meal as it is in most Western societies today. For the ancient Israelites, bread was the most basic type of food, seen as necessary to sustain life (see Sirach 29:21; 39:26 [39:31 in Douay-Rheims]). In fact, the expression "to eat bread" could describe simply eating in general (see Genesis 31:54; 1 Kings 13:8-9, 16-19). The Bible even depicts bread as similar to a staff ("the staff of bread"), which shows how bread was seen as a support for human life (see Leviticus 26:26; Psalm 105:16; Ezekiel 4:16; 5:16). Yet the Israelites were called to give up some of their bread in the regular offerings and sacrifices (see Exodus 29:1-2; Leviticus 2:4-7; 7:13) and in the annual Feast of Weeks ceremony (Leviticus 23:15-20). To part with one's bread would have been a personal sacrifice, expressing the individual's giving of himself to God.

Similarly, wine was not just a side beverage but a common part of ancient Israelite meals. It was often consumed with bread (see Judges 19:19; 1 Samuel 16:20; Psalm 104:15) and was served at feasts (1 Samuel 25:36; Job 1:13) and for guests (Genesis 14:18). Yet like bread, wine was also offered up in Israel's sacrifices. It was one of the first fruits presented to the Temple as a tithe (see Nehemiah 10:36-39), and it was poured out as a drink offering (a libation) in Israel's thanksgiving and expiatory sacrifices (Exodus 29:38-41; Numbers 15:2-15). Since there was a close connection between the sacrificial gifts and the individual giver, offering bread and wine symbolized the offering of one's self.

The same is true with the presentation of our gifts in the Mass today. In the bread and wine, we offer back to God the gifts of creation and the result of our labors—or, as the prayer in the Mass calls them, "fruit of the earth and work of human hands." Ultimately, the rite symbolizes our giving of our entire lives to God in the offering of bread and wine. As one commentator noted, "There is no scrap of

bread which does not call to mind the hard work of plowing and sowing, the moist brow of the reaper, the weariness of the arms which have threshed the corn, and the grunts of the baker who kneaded the dough close to the scorching oven."[61] The same could be said of the wine, which comes from the grapes harvested from vines that had been carefully tended throughout the year.

More Than Money

The practice of giving money (which eventually overshadowed the offering of oil, fruit, and other sundry gifts) can be seen in the same light. Putting money in the basket is not simply a contribution to some good cause. It, too, expresses the giving of our lives to God. Our money embodies hours of our lives and hard work, which we now offer to God during Mass in the presentation of the gifts.

Yet some Christians might wonder, "Why does God need our gifts? He sent his Son to die for our sins. Why does he need our meager sacrifices of bread, wine, and money?" Ultimately, God does not need these things. Lacking nothing, God is God with or without our gifts. But we need to offer these gifts. We need to grow in self-giving love, and this is one reason why he invites us to unite our lives to him in this way. These small offerings help us expand our hearts and grow in sacrificial love. Moreover, though they do not count for much on their own, what gives them immense value is the love we put into them and the fact that we unite our meager gifts with Christ's perfect sacrifice. In the presentation of the gifts, it is as if we bring our entire lives and all our little sacrifices (which are symbolized by the gifts) to the hands of Jesus himself (who is represented by the priest).[62] The priest then brings our gifts to the altar, which is the place where Christ's sacrifice is made present, in order to express our union with Christ's offering to the Father.

15. The Water and Wine, Washing of Hands, and Prayer over the Offerings

Pay attention. When the priest is mixing water and wine, washing his hands, and reciting various prayers and blessings at the altar, he is not merely getting things ready, like a host setting the table for a special event. He is acting like an ancient Jewish priest in the temple and signaling to us that he is preparing to enter the Holy of Holies, encounter God's holy presence, and offer sacrifice to God on our behalf.

Each of the prayers and rituals during this part of the Liturgy draws on much biblical symbolism, which prepares us for all we are about to experience in this supreme part of the Mass, the Liturgy of the Eucharist.

Mixing Water and Wine

Though it was a common practice in the ancient world to dilute wine with a bit of water, Christians have seen profound theological significance in the mixing of water and wine at this moment in the Liturgy. The meaning is expressed in the prayer said by the priest or deacon:

By the mystery of this water and wine
may we come to share in the divinity of Christ
who humbled himself to share in our humanity.

In a traditional interpretation of this practice, the wine symbolizes Christ's divinity and water symbolizes our humanity. The mingling of the water and wine points to the mystery of God becoming man. It also points to our call to share in Christ's divine life. We human beings are like water, but we become infused with the wine of God's divine life. Indeed, we who possess fallen human nature become so transformed by Christ that we become "partakers of the divine nature" (2 Peter 1:4). The source of this transformation is found in a special way when we receive Jesus in Holy Communion.

Ancient Jewish Blessings

The priest also prays over the bread and wine, using words which have roots in Jewish tradition. They are modeled after ancient Jewish blessings over bread and wine used in meals probably around the time of Jesus. So when the priest recites these prayers, we are united with words of blessing that Jesus, Mary, Joseph, and the apostles likely would have known:

Blessed are you, Lord God of all creation,
for through your goodness we have received
the bread we offer you:
fruit of the earth and work of human hands,
it will become for us the bread of life. ...

Blessed are you, Lord God of all creation,
for through your goodness we have received
the wine we offer you:

> fruit of the vine and work of human hands,
> it will become our spiritual drink.

"May *We* Be Accepted by You"

The priest's next prayer makes even clearer the connection between the *gifts* of bread and wine and the *giver* who offers them to God. The priest prays,

> With humble spirit and contrite heart
> may we be accepted by you, O Lord,
> and may our sacrifice in your sight this day
> be pleasing to you, Lord God.

Notice how the sacrifice envisioned in this prayer is not some *thing* being offered to God, like bread and wine, but us, the people assembled at Mass: "May *we* be accepted by you …"

This theme, as well as the mention of a humble spirit and contrite heart, recalls the petition of the three Hebrew men thrown into the fiery furnace in Daniel 3. Being persecuted by the Babylonian king, Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego cried out to God with a "humble spirit" and a "contrite heart" asking that they themselves would be accepted by the Lord just as a burnt offering in the Temple would. In other words, the three men associated *their very lives* with a sacrifice offered up to God (see Daniel 3:15-17 [3:38-40 in NAB and Douay-Rheims]). The Lord heard their cry and rescued them. At Mass, the priest makes a similar petition. We have seen in the previous chapter how our lives are bound up with the bread and wine offered to the Lord. Now the priest—like Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego—cries out on our behalf to God with a "humble spirit" and a "contrite heart," asking that we be accepted as a pleasing sacrifice.

Entering the Holy of Holies

Next, the priest washes his hands in a gesture that signals a dramatic event is about to take place. This practice recalls rites for the priests of the Old Testament. At their consecration, the priests and Levites had to undergo ritual washings before they could perform their duties in the sanctuary (see Exodus 29:4; Numbers 8:7). The priests needed to wash their hands (and feet) in a bronze basin of water before entering the tabernacle or drawing near to the altar of incense (see Exodus 30:17-21). Psalm 24 reflects the importance of this ritual for people preparing to enter the Temple: "Who shall ascend the hill of the LORD? And who shall stand in his holy place? He who has clean hands and a pure heart" (Psalm 24:3-4). Notice how clean hands are associated with a pure heart. In this psalm, ritual handwashing symbolizes the internal cleansing of heart required before a person could draw near to God's presence in the sanctuary.

With this biblical background, we can see that the priest's handwashing at Mass indicates that he, like the Levitical priests of old, is about to stand in a most holy place—one that is even more awe-inspiring than the Temple in Jerusalem. God's presence sometimes manifested itself visibly in the form of a cloud in the Old Testament sanctuaries (see Exodus 40:34; 1 Kings 8:10-11). But in the Mass, God is about to come to his people in an even more intimate way. On the altar before which the priest stands, the gifts of bread and wine will soon be changed into Christ's very Body and Blood, and Our Lord will soon dwell within us as we receive him in Holy Communion. Jesus, the one true High Priest, will accomplish this through the priest's hands. In preparation for this most sacred moment, the priest washes his hands like the priests of old as he approaches a new Holy of Holies. And to prepare his soul for this holy task, he echoes David's humble prayer of contrition: "Wash me thoroughly from my iniquity, and cleanse me from my sin" (Psalm 51:2).

We sit silently in awe as we watch the priest prepare for his sacred role in word and ritual.

"My Sacrifice and Yours"

Finally, in one last act of preparation, the priest turns to the people, begging them for prayers as he is about to begin the Eucharistic Prayer:

> Pray, brethren,
> that my sacrifice and yours
> may be acceptable to God,
> the almighty Father.

Why does the priest describe two kinds of sacrifice here? To what is he referring when he speaks of "my sacrifice and yours"?

The "my" part of the sacrifice points to what the ordained priest will do as he acts *in persona Christi* ("in the person of Christ"). Through the priest, Christ's sacrifice on the Cross will be made present to us sacramentally in the Liturgy. The "your" part of the sacrifice points to our participation in Christ's sacrifice. We unite our entire lives with this perfect gift of Christ's love, the sacrificial gift of himself made present in the Mass. The people respond with a prayer that recognizes how both sacrifices—Christ's and their own—will be united and offered to the Father through the hands of the priest:[63]

> May the Lord accept the sacrifice at your hands
> for the praise and glory of his name,
> for our good
> and the good of all his holy Church.

This is the laity's fullest participation in Christ's priesthood.

The EUCHARISTIC Prayer

Scholars have noted that the Eucharistic Prayer has roots in Jewish table prayers recited at every meal. Near the start of the meal, the father of the family or the one presiding over the community would take bread and speak a blessing (*barakah*) that praises God, saying, "Blessed are you, Lord, our God, king of the universe, who has brought forth bread from the earth." The bread was then broken and given to the participants, and the people began eating the various courses of the meal. At the Passover meal, there also would be a reading of the *haggadah*, which retold the story of the first Passover in Egypt and interpreted that foundational event in Israel's history for the current generation. This made present God's saving deeds of the past and applied the story to their lives. When the meal neared its conclusion, the presider prayed a second and longer *barakah* over a cup of wine. This blessing had three parts: (1) *praise* of God for his creation, (2) *thanksgiving* for his redemptive work in the past (for example, the giving of the covenant, the land, the law), and (3) *supplication* for the future, that God's saving works would continue in their lives and be brought to their climax in the sending of the Messiah who would restore the Davidic kingdom.

The early Eucharistic Prayers seem to have followed this general pattern. They included reciting a blessing over bread and wine and retelling the foundational saving event of Jesus' death and resurrection, followed by the three-fold offering of *praise* to God for creation, *thanksgiving* for his

saving deeds, and *supplication*. As we will soon see, these ancient Jewish elements are also found in the Eucharistic Prayers of the Mass today.

We will now consider the following parts of the Eucharistic Prayer: (1) the Preface, (2) the *Sanctus*, (3) the *epiclesis*, (4) the words of institution and consecration, (5) "the mystery of faith," and (6) the *anamnesis*, offering, intercessions, and doxology.

16. The Preface

The Eucharistic Prayer opens with a three-part dialogue that has been recited in the Church since at least the early third century:

Priest: The Lord be with you.
People: And with your spirit.

Priest: Lift up your hearts.
People: We lift them up to the Lord.

Priest: Let us give thanks to the Lord our God.
People: It is right and just.

This dialogue is first reported in the Eucharistic Prayer of St. Hippolytus (c. AD 215).[64] Now, eighteen centuries later, we continue to say the same words, uniting us with the Christians of the early Church.

"The Lord Be with You"

The opening exchange ("The Lord be with you … And with your spirit") we have heard before. It was used in the Introductory Rites at the start of Mass and just before the reading of the Gospel. In

Chapter 3, we saw that greetings like this were used in the Bible to address those whom God called to an important but daunting mission. They needed the Lord to be with them as they set out on their charge. Here the greeting is fittingly repeated as we embark on the most sacred part of the Mass: the Eucharistic Prayer. Both the priest and the people need the Lord to be with them as they prepare to enter into the mystery of the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass.

Lifting Our Hearts

Next the priest says, "Lift up your hearts" (*sursum corda* in Latin). This prayer brings to mind the similar exhortation in the book of Lamentations: "Let us lift up our hearts and hands to God in heaven" (Lamentations 3:41). But what does it mean to "lift up" our hearts?

In the Bible, the heart is the hidden center of the person, from which thoughts, emotions, and actions originate. All intentions and commitments flow from the human heart. Therefore, when the priest at Mass says, "Lift up your hearts," he is summoning us to give our fullest attention to what is about to unfold. This is a wake-up call to set aside all other concerns and focus our minds, wills, and emotions—our hearts—on the sublimity of what is happening in the Eucharistic Prayer.

This summons is reminiscent of St. Paul's words to the Colossians: "If then you have been raised with Christ, seek the things that are above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God. Set your minds on things that are above, not on things that are on earth" (Colossians 3:1-2). Just as Paul called the Colossians to seek the "things that are above, where Christ is," so are we bidden to direct our entire being toward the things of heaven, for that is where Christ is. And that is where we are going in the Eucharistic Prayer.

Our Fullest Attention

St. Cyprian, a third-century Church Father, explained how this prayer draws our attention away from worldly distractions and is meant to lead us to ponder the awe-inspiring action taking place in the Eucharistic Prayer:

> When we stand praying, beloved brethren, we ought to be watchful and earnest with our whole heart, intent on our prayers. Let all carnal and worldly thoughts pass away, nor let the soul at that time think on anything but the object only of its prayer. For this reason also the priest by way of preface before his prayer, prepares the minds of the brethren by saying, *Lift up your hearts*, that so upon the people's response, *We have them before our Lord*, he may be reminded that he himself ought to think of nothing but our Lord.[65]

St. Cyril of Jerusalem made a similar point and warned believers of the seriousness of this moment:

> *Lift up your hearts.* For in this sublime moment the heart should be lifted up to God, and not be allowed to descend to the earth and to earthly concerns. With all possible emphasis the sacrificing priest exhorts us in this hour to lay aside all the cares of this life, all domestic worries, and direct our hearts to God in heaven who hath so loved men. … Let there be none among you, who shall confess with his lips: We have lifted up our hearts, and allow his thoughts to remain with the cares of this life.[66]

Cyril goes on to acknowledge that while we should always be attentive to the Lord, it is difficult because we are fallen and weak. Yet if there ever is a moment to concentrate most intently and give God our fullest attention, it is now at the Eucharistic Prayer: "We should, indeed, think of God at all times, but this is impossible because of our human frailty; but in this holy time especially our hearts should be with God."[67]

The Great Thanksgiving

In the last liturgical exchange, the priest says, "Let us give thanks to the Lord our God …" As we already have seen in the *Gloria* ("We give you thanks …") and in the response to the Scripture readings ("Thanks be to God"), thanksgiving is a common biblical response to God's goodness and to his saving works in our lives. The priest directing us to give thanks to the Lord echoes the similar exhortation found in the psalms: "Give thanks to the LORD, for he is good …" (Psalm 136:1-3; see also Psalm 107:8, 15, 21, 31). In the Jewish tradition, thanksgiving is one thing we can actually offer the Creator that he does not possess already. The first-century Jewish commentator Philo expressed this point:

> We affirm that the activity most characteristic of God is to give His blessings. But that most fitting to creation is to give thanks, because that is the best it can offer Him in return. For when creation tries to make any other return to God it finds that its gift already belongs to the Creator of the universe, not to the creature offering it. Since we now realize that to give due worship to God only one duty is incumbent upon us, that of giving thanks, we must carry it out in all times and in all places.[68]

St. Paul similarly teaches that the Christian life should be marked by prayers of thanksgiving. We should be "abounding in thanksgiving" (Colossians 2:7), giving thanks to God in all we do (see Colossians 3:17) and "in all circumstances" (1 Thessalonians 5:18; see also Philippians 4:6), especially in worship (1 Corinthians 14:16-19; Ephesians 5:19-20; Colossians 3:16).

Following this biblical tradition of offering prayers of thanksgiving, the priest invites us to "give thanks to the Lord our God." And there is a lot to be thankful for at this point in the Mass. Like the ancient Israelites who thanked the Lord for delivering them from their enemies, so we now should thank God for sending his Son to save us

from sin and the Evil One. That redemptive act of Christ's death and resurrection is about to be made present to us in the Liturgy, and we humbly express our gratitude.

We also should be thankful for the miracle about to take place in our midst, as the bread and wine on the altar will be changed into the Body and Blood of Jesus. Our Lord and King will soon be with us in the real presence of the Eucharist. Our hearts should be filled with gratitude as our church becomes like a new Holy of Holies, housing the divine presence. What an awesome privilege it is for us to draw near! We are like the ancient Israelites who approached the temple of God's dwelling with joyous psalms of praise and thanksgiving. In fact, we should hear in the priest's instruction, "Let us give thanks to the Lord our God," an echo of the psalmist's words to those pilgrims who drew near to Jerusalem: "Let us come into his presence with thanksgiving" (Psalm 95:2) and "Enter his gates with thanksgiving" (Psalm 100:4).

There is so much to be thankful for at this moment in the Liturgy! We therefore acknowledge that gratitude is the only fitting response to the mysteries about to unfold before us. In answer to the priest's invitation to thank the Lord, we say, "It is right and just."

Preface Prayer

After inviting us to give thanks to the Lord, the priest now talks to God in a prayer of thanksgiving. The opening line is addressed to the Father and expresses what we have seen throughout Scripture: the duty of God's people to thank the Lord. One option for the Preface prayer, for example, begins, "It is truly right and just, our duty and salvation, always and everywhere to give you thanks, Father most holy …" But the priest does not say this prayer for himself. He offers it on behalf of the people who just expressed their desire to join the priest in thanking God when they said "it is right and just" to give God thanks and praise. St. John Chrysostom makes this point, noting

how the priest (envisioned by Chrysostom as the bishop) represents the people in this prayer: "The prayer of thanksgiving is made in common. The bishop does not give thanks alone, but the whole assembly joins him. For, though the bishop speaks for the people, he does so only after they have said that it is fitting and right that he should begin the Eucharist."[69]

This Preface prayer follows the pattern of thanksgiving in the psalms in the Old Testament. Thanksgiving in general was offered for the gift of God's creation (see Psalm 136:4-9), for his provision in his people's lives (Psalm 67:6-7), for his wondrous deeds (Psalm 75:1), and for his saving acts (Psalm 35:17-18). In these kinds of psalms, God's people responded with gratitude when the Lord rescued a person in a particular way, whether it be healing (see Psalms 30, 116), saving someone from their enemies (Psalms 18, 92, 118, 138), or delivering them from some trouble (Psalm 66:14). The psalmist gives an account of his trials and how God rescued him, which serves as the basis for the praise and thanksgiving.

This pattern can be seen in Psalm 136, which starts with the psalmist thanking God for his marvelous works of creation: for making the earth, the waters, the stars, the sun, and the moon. The psalm then moves to recount God's saving deeds in Israel's history: bringing the Israelites out of Egypt, parting the Red Sea, overthrowing Pharaoh in the waters, leading the people through the wilderness, and defeating Israel's enemies. Next, the psalmist proclaims how this same God, who rescued their ancestors long ago, has also performed an act of deliverance for God's people in the present. This same God who delivered their ancestors from Egypt has also "remembered *us* in our low estate" and "rescued *us* from our foes" (Psalm 136:23-24, emphasis added). Therefore, the community gathered with the psalmist has great cause for thanksgiving. God's love for his people has been steadfast throughout history. He has been faithful to his people from the time of the Exodus to the present. The psalmist thus

concludes, "O give thanks to the God of heaven, for his mercy endures forever" (Psalm 136:26).

The Eucharistic Prayers are not randomly invented prayers or extemporaneous forms of praying that someone a long time ago put into writing. The Eucharistic Prayers follow the ancient biblical pattern, the pattern God himself gave us for praying in the psalms. For we, like the psalmists of old, have much to be thankful for. Like Psalm 136, the Eucharistic Prayer recounts God's marvelous deeds in salvation history. This recounting may take on various forms, as there are several options for the Preface. Some forms of this prayer thank God for his work of creation. Others highlight specific aspects of Christ's saving work, depending on the feast or season. For example, in the Christmas season, the priest thanks God for becoming man. In Holy Week, the priest refers to how the hour is approaching when Jesus triumphed over Satan. In the Easter Season, the priest thanks God for the eternal life Christ has won for us. But all these prayers focus on thanking God for the very heart of his saving plan: Christ's life-giving death and resurrection.

17. The *Sanctus*: "Holy, Holy, Holy Lord"

Holy, Holy, Holy Lord God of hosts.
Heaven and earth are full of your glory.
Hosanna in the highest.
Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord.
Hosanna in the highest.

The prayer known as the *Sanctus* (Latin for "holy") helps us to see with the eyes of the angels what is really happening in the Eucharistic Liturgy. Right away, the opening words "Holy, Holy, Holy Lord …" take us spiritually up to heaven. They come from Isaiah 6:3, a passage in which the prophet receives a vision of the heavenly King in the divine throne room, with his majesty magnificently displayed and his angelic court adoring him.

Isaiah reports that he saw "the LORD sitting upon a throne, high and lifted up; and his train filled the temple" (Isaiah 6:1). Above the Lord are the six-winged angelic seraphim. (*Seraphim* means "burning ones" in Hebrew.) This unique title suggests that these angels are so close to God that they reflect his radiance. Yet even these angelic beings stand in utter awe before the divine presence. They cover their faces, daring not to

behold the full glory of God (see Isaiah 6:2), and they call to one another in an ecstatic hymn of praise: "Holy, holy, holy is the LORD of hosts; the whole earth is full of his glory" (Isaiah 6:3).

The three-fold repetition of the word "holy" here is the strongest form of the superlative in Hebrew. The seraphim, therefore, acclaim the Lord as the all-holy One, the one God above all other gods. And by singing "the whole earth is full of his glory," they praise God for his splendor, which is displayed throughout creation (see Psalms 8:1; 19:1-6; 24:1-2).

This angelic hymn of praise has dramatic effects. When they sing, the foundations of the Temple shake, and the room is filled with smoke. Isaiah understandably feels afraid. Recognizing his unworthiness to stand in the holy presence of God, he says, "Woe is me! For I am lost; for I am a man of unclean lips … for my eyes have seen the King, the LORD of hosts!" (Isaiah 6:5).

Singing with the Angels

In the New Testament, St. John has a similar experience. He is caught up in the Spirit on the Lord's Day (see Revelation 1:10) and has an ecstatic vision of the heavenly liturgy. John sees Jesus, the Son of Man, in radiant glory, and like Isaiah he responds in fear: "When I saw him, I fell at his feet as though dead" (Revelation 1:17). Again like Isaiah, John sees the six-winged angelic creatures before the throne of God, who sing a similar hymn of praise: "Holy, holy, holy, is the Lord God Almighty, who was and is and is to come!" (Revelation 4:8). Reminiscent of Isaiah's account of the seraphim praising God for his glory revealed in the cosmos, John reports how "the twenty-four elders" fall down before God's throne, praising him for his creation as they sing:

> Worthy are you, our Lord and God,
> to receive glory and honor and power,
> for you created all things,

> and by your will they existed and were created.
> (Revelation 4:11)

With this background in mind, we can understand more clearly what it means for us to say at Mass: "Holy, Holy, Holy Lord, God of hosts …" We are joining our voices with the angels and saints in heaven in their jubilant hymn of praise. And how fitting it is to do so at this very moment in the Mass! In the Eucharistic Liturgy, we become like Isaiah and St. John, caught up to the heavenly Liturgy (see CCC 1139). We are mystically entering the heavenly throne room—the same one that Isaiah saw in his earth-shaking vision that filled the Temple with smoke as the angels sang. Both the prophet and the apostle felt unworthy to behold this awesome sign, and even the seraphim felt the need to cover their faces as they flew before the glory of God. Like them, we are preparing to encounter the King of Kings, the all-holy divine Lord, who will become present on the altar. No wonder we fall to our knees in reverence after singing this hymn.

In the second half of the *Sanctus*, we repeat words that the crowds used to greet Jesus as he processed into Jerusalem: "Hosanna" and "Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord." Both expressions were originally in Psalm 118, a pilgrimage hymn recited on the way to the Temple for major feasts. *Hosanna* is a transliteration of a Hebrew word meaning "Save us," which became an expression of praise in liturgical worship. The blessing upon the one "who comes in the name of the Lord" was normally invoked on the pilgrims coming to the Temple. On the day we know as Palm Sunday, the crowds used these words to welcome Jesus as the one coming in the Lord's name—in other words, the one representing God and acting on his behalf.

It is fitting that we repeat these words at this moment in the Liturgy. Just as the crowds in Jerusalem welcomed Jesus into the holy city with these words from Psalm 118, so do we welcome Jesus into our churches, for he is about to become present in the Eucharist on our altars.

18. The *Epiclesis*

The Holy Spirit is present and active throughout the entire Mass. But at this moment, the priest invokes the Holy Spirit in a unique way.

In a prayer known as the *epiclesis* (meaning "invocation upon"), the priest prays that the Father send the Holy Spirit upon the gifts of bread and wine to change them into the Body and Blood of our Lord. The same Holy Spirit who brought about the conception of God's Son in the womb of the Virgin Mary some two thousand years ago is invoked to bring about another miracle today: the miracle of the real presence of Jesus in the Eucharist, the changing of the bread and wine into the very Body and Blood, Soul and Divinity of Christ.

Praying for the presence of Our Lord and King to come among us unites us with the hopes and prayers of the ancient Jewish people. We saw earlier that in the ancient Jewish table prayers, the blessing over the cup included a supplication that God send the Messiah to Israel. Quite naturally, the early Christians included a similar supplication in the Eucharistic Prayer. Like the ancient Jews who pleaded with God to send the Messiah, the priest at the *epiclesis* petitions that the Messiah-King be made present once again, this time under the appearances of bread and wine. Consider the *epiclesis* prayer in Eucharistic Prayer III:

> Therefore, O Lord, we humbly implore you:
> by the same Spirit graciously make holy
> these gifts we have brought to you for consecration,
> that they may become the Body and Blood
> of your Son our Lord Jesus Christ.

Like the Dewfall

In Eucharistic Prayer II, the *epiclesis* prayer compares the action of the Spirit to that of the morning dew:

> 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.

The morning dewfall was seen as a mysterious, subtle, unexpected event—an appropriate image for God's saving work. In Scripture, the idea of the morning dewfall is associated with the mysterious manna God gave the Israelites in the desert. Each morning, "when the dew had gone up," the people found the miraculous bread provided by the Lord (Exodus 16:12-15). The prophet Hosea also uses the image of dew to describe how, even though the unfaithful Israelites were like an arid desert, God would still come to them with his love like the dewfall: "I will heal their faithlessness; I will love them freely, for my anger has turned from them. I will be as the dew to Israel; he shall blossom as the lily" (Hosea 14:4-5). Isaiah similarly uses the dew imagery to foretell how, even though the oppressed, suffering Jewish people might feel like they were dead and lying in the dust, God will rescue them: "Your dead shall live, their bodies shall rise. O dwellers in the dust, awake and sing for joy. For your dew is a dew of light, and on the land of the shades you will let it fall" (Isaiah 26:19).

How fitting it is for the Liturgy to draw upon this image of the dewfall at this moment in the Mass. For the priest is invoking the Holy Spirit to bring God's forgiveness and healing love to us once again, to bring life in the deserts of our soul. The priest calls upon the Holy Spirit to come upon the bread and wine and change it into the new manna of the Eucharist, the only bread that can satisfy and reach into the deepest caverns of our souls.

There is a second epiclesis after the words of institution that relates to the other petition made in the ancient Jewish prayers, that of the House of David being restored. Just as many Jews expected the Messiah to unite God's people in a restored Davidic kingdom, so we confidently hope that the Messiah who comes to us in the Eucharist will unite us more deeply together in his Church. Hence, the priest calls on the Holy Spirit, praying that the Eucharist may draw all those who receive into a greater communion:

> Grant that we, who are nourished
> by the Body and Blood of your Son
> and filled with his Holy Spirit,
> *may become one body, one spirit in Christ.*
> (Eucharistic Prayer III, emphasis added)

Similarly, in other Eucharistic Prayers, the priest petitions that after receiving the one Body of Christ in the Eucharist, "we may be gathered into one" (Eucharistic Prayer II) or "gathered into one body" (Eucharistic Prayer IV). Now that the Holy Spirit has been invoked to come upon the gifts of bread and wine, we are prepared to come to the most sacred part of the Liturgy: the words of institution and consecration.

19. The Words of Institution and Consecration

TAKE THIS, ALL OF YOU, AND EAT OF IT,
FOR THIS IS MY BODY,
WHICH WILL BE GIVEN UP FOR YOU. ...

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 SINS.

DO THIS IN MEMORY OF ME.

For some Catholics, these words might be *too* familiar. Some of us have heard these words hundreds of times since our childhood, repeated at every Mass. We might be tempted to take them for granted or consider them routine.

But what if we had never heard these words before? What if we were Peter, James, or one of the other apostles present at the Last Supper? What would these words have meant to us?

To understand the full meaning of these sacred words, it is important to hear them against the background of the Passover. The Gospels that recount the institution narrative tell us that the Last Supper took place in the context of the Passover meal—the annual feast that celebrated the foundational night in Israel's history when God liberated the Israelites from Egypt (see Matthew 26:19; Mark 14:16; Luke 22:13). On that first Passover, God instructed the people to sacrifice an unblemished lamb, eat of the lamb, and mark their doorposts with its blood. The families who participated in this ritual were spared when the firstborn sons in Egypt were struck down in the tenth plague. Year after year, subsequent Israelites retold the story of that first Passover and reenacted it, eating a sacrificial lamb once again.

Most significantly, the Israelites celebrated the annual Passover as a liturgical "memorial" (*anamnesis* in Greek) (see Exodus 12:14). For the ancient Jews, this involved much more than remembering a past event. A memorial such as Passover was very different from modern holidays such as the Fourth of July, on which Americans simply call to mind the founding of their country. In a biblical memorial, the past was not merely recalled; it was *relived*. The past event was mystically made present to those celebrating the feast. This is why Jews in Jesus' day believed that when they celebrated this feast, the first Passover was made present to them as a "memorial." In fact, when later Jewish rabbis wrote about the Passover, they said that when a Jew celebrates the feast, it was as if he himself were walking out of Egypt with his great ancestors from the Exodus generation.[70] The *Catechism* makes a similar point:

> In the sense of Sacred Scripture the *memorial* is not merely the recollection of past events but the proclamation of the mighty works wrought by God for men. In the liturgical celebration of these events, they become in a certain way present and real. This is how Israel understands its liberation from Egypt: every time Passover is celebrated, the Exodus events are made present to the memory of believers so that they may conform their lives to them. (CCC 1363)

In this way, the first Passover event was extended in time so that each new generation could participate spiritually in this foundational event of their liberation from servitude. The annual Passover feast thus forged solidarity throughout the generations. All Israelites participated in the Passover. All were saved from slavery in Egypt. All were united in the one covenant family of God.

The Mass as Sacrifice?

If you were one of the apostles present at the Last Supper, one thing that might strike you about Jesus' words is that he used sacrificial language with reference to himself. First, the Passover itself was a sacrifice (see Exodus 12:27). For Jesus to speak about Body and Blood in the context of Passover would bring to mind the Passover lamb, the blood of which was separated from the body in the ceremonial sacrifice. Second, when Jesus says his Body "is given for you" (Luke 22:19), the term used in Luke's Gospel for "given," *didomai* in Greek, is significant, for it is employed elsewhere in the New Testament in association with sacrifice (see, for example, Luke 2:24; Mark 10:45; John 6:51; Galatians 1:4). Third, when Jesus speaks of his Blood "which will be poured out … for the forgiveness of sins," he alludes to the atoning sacrifices in the Temple, which involved blood being poured out over the altar for the purpose of bringing forgiveness (see Leviticus 4:7, 18, 25, 30, 34).

Fourth, and perhaps most significantly, Jesus speaks of "the blood of the new and eternal covenant." These words echo what Moses said in the sacrificial ceremony at Mount Sinai that sealed God's covenant union with Israel as his chosen people (see Exodus 24:1-17). In the midst of that sacrificial rite, Moses took the blood of the animals and announced, "Behold the blood of the covenant" (Exodus 24:8). Now, at the Last Supper, Jesus refers to *his* Blood as "the blood of the new and eternal covenant." For the apostles present there, these words

could not help but recall what Moses said about the sacrificial blood at Sinai and point to some kind of new sacrifice for a new covenant.

With all these sacrificial themes—the Passover ritual, a body being given up, blood being poured out, and the blood of the covenant—Jesus clearly has some type of sacrifice in mind here. Yet instead of speaking about the Passover lamb being sacrificed (which is what one might expect in the context of a Passover meal), he talks about *his own* Body and Blood being offered up and poured out in sacrifice. *His* Blood is now the sacrificial blood of the covenant. Jesus surprisingly identifies *himself* with the sacrificial lamb normally offered for Passover. Jesus' actions at the Last Supper thus mysteriously anticipate his sacrifice on the Cross. In the Passover meal of the Last Supper, Jesus willingly offers up his own Body and Blood for the forgiveness of sins. All that is left for him to do is to carry out that sacrifice in a bloody manner on Good Friday.[71]

Understanding this connection between the Last Supper and the Cross sheds important light on how the Eucharist we celebrate today commemorates Christ's sacrifice on Calvary. For Jesus concludes the institution of the Eucharist by saying, "Do this in memory of me" (Luke 22:19). What is the "this" that Jesus commands the apostles to do? It is to celebrate the New Passover sacrifice of his Body and Blood. And how are they to do it? As a biblical memorial. The word *memory* used in the Mass translates the biblical word for "memorial" (*anamnesis*), which, as we have seen, means much more than merely remembering the past. The liturgical memorial brings the past and present together, making the long-ago event mystically present for the current generation.

Hence, when Jesus commands the apostles, "Do this in memory of me," he is not telling them to perform a simple ritual meal that will help people remember him. He is instructing them to celebrate the Last Supper as a liturgical memorial. All that was involved in the Last Supper—most particularly, the sacrificial offering of Christ's Body

and Blood—would be made present to worshippers in the celebration of the Eucharist.

Therefore, as the memorial of the Lord's Supper, the Eucharist makes the events of the Upper Room and Calvary sacramentally present to us today. Just as the ancient Jews participated in the Exodus year after year through the memorial of Passover, so do we Christians participate in the new Exodus of Jesus' triumphant death on the Cross every time we celebrate the new Passover of the Eucharist.

It is in this sense that the Mass is to be understood as a sacrifice. As the *Catechism* explains, "In the New Testament, the memorial takes on new meaning. When the Church celebrates the Eucharist, she commemorates Christ's Passover, and it is made present: the sacrifice Christ offered once for all on the Cross remains ever present" (CCC 1364). And this sacrifice is made present for a salvific purpose: so that its power may be applied to our lives for the daily sins we commit and so that we can unite ourselves more deeply to Christ in his act of total self-giving love (see CCC 1366).

Indeed, in every Mass, we have a unique opportunity to enter sacramentally into the Son's intimate, loving gift of himself to the Father—a gift that is revealed most clearly in his death on the Cross. In the Mass, we can join all our joys and sufferings with Jesus' offering of himself to the Father, and in so doing, we offer ever more of our own lives as a gift to the Father. As the *Catechism* explains,

> In the Eucharist the sacrifice of Christ becomes also the sacrifice of the members of his Body. The lives of the faithful, their praise, sufferings, prayer, and work, are united with those of Christ and with his total offering, and so acquire a new value. Christ's sacrifice present on the altar makes it possible for all generations of Christians to be united with his offering. (CCC 1368)

For Many or For All?

Finally, some may wonder why Jesus says that his Blood will be poured out "for you and for many" for the forgiveness of sins. At first glance, this sounds as if Jesus did not die on the Cross for everyone—that he offered his Blood on Calvary not "for all" but just for a select group of people ("for many"). Was Jesus limiting the universal scope of his saving mission?

On a basic level, Jesus' words from the Last Supper point to the reality that while Jesus died for all, not everyone chooses to accept this gift. Each individual must choose to welcome the gift of salvation and live according to this grace, so that he or she may be among "the many" who are described in this text.

Moreover, many Scripture scholars have observed that Jesus' language at the Last Supper about his Blood being poured out "for many" recalls "the many" that are mentioned three times in the famous prophecy of Isaiah 53.[72] In this prophecy, Isaiah foretold that God one day would send his servant who would make himself "an offering for sin," pouring out his soul to death and bearing the sin of "many" and making "many" righteous (Isaiah 53:10-12). Jesus, speaking at the Last Supper about his own Blood being poured out "for many," is clearly associating himself with the Suffering Servant of Isaiah. He is the one coming to die for the "many." This should not be understood, however, in opposition to the fact that Jesus died "for all" (1 Timothy 2:6). The other prophecies in Isaiah about the Servant of the Lord make clear that he has a universal mission, one that announces salvation to *all* humanity (see, for example, Isaiah 42:1-10; 49:6; 52:10). In a sense, the expression "the many" can be seen as contrasting the *one* person who dies—the Lord's Servant (Jesus)—with *the many* who benefit from his atoning sacrifice.

20. "The Mystery of Faith"

We have arrived at the supreme moment of the Mass. The priest has spoken the words of consecration over the bread and wine, and they have now become the Body and Blood of Christ. In reverence, the priest genuflects in silent adoration before Christ's Blood in the chalice and then rises and solemnly says, "The mystery of faith."

These words are not so much a ceremonial cue for the people to say their part next. Rather, they express the priest's profound wonder and awe over the mystery that is taking place. Jesus Christ, the Son of God, whose Body and Blood were offered for our sins on Calvary, is now really present on the altar under the appearances of bread and wine. Using an expression of St. Paul (see 1 Timothy 3:9), the priest exclaims that this truly is "the mystery of faith"! Joining the priest's wonder over this mystery, the people proclaim the story of salvation summed up in Jesus' death and resurrection. Two of the acclamation options draw from these words of St. Paul to the Corinthians: "For as often as you eat this bread and drink the chalice, you proclaim the Lord's death until he comes" (1 Corinthians 11:26):

> We proclaim your Death, O Lord,
> and profess your Resurrection
> until you come again.

or

When we eat this Bread and drink this Cup,
we proclaim your Death, O Lord,
until you come again.

A third option proclaims the saving power of Christ's death and resurrection while drawing on the words of the Samaritans who, after encountering Jesus, came to believe in him, saying, "We know that this is indeed the Savior of the world" (John 4:42).

Save us, Savior of the world,
for by your Cross and Resurrection
you have set us free.

21. The *Anamnesis*, Offering, Intercessions, and Final Doxology

The ineffable mysteries unfolding before us cannot be taken in all at once. It is as if we need to pause and lengthen the moment in order to grasp their meaning and enter into them. The two prayers that follow the words of institution do just that: They make explicit various aspects of what is happening in the Liturgy and allow us to ponder them in our hearts.

The first prayer is called the *anamnesis*. We have seen how the whole Eucharistic Prayer is a "memorial" (*anamnesis* in Greek), making present Christ's saving action on the Cross so that we may participate in its power more fully. In a stricter, more technical sense, however, the *anamnesis* here refers to a prayer that identifies what is happening in the Mass. Jesus said, "Do this in memory of me." Now the priest tells the Father in heaven that the Church has been faithful in fulfilling Christ's command:

> Therefore, as we celebrate
> the memorial of his Death and Resurrection ...
> (Eucharistic Prayer II)

God, of course, does not need to be told what we're doing during Mass; he knows it all already. We, however, have a need to tell him. Like small children who eagerly tell their parents their accomplishments ("Dad, did you see me hit the ball into the outfield!"), we have a need to tell our heavenly Father of our joyous participation in these sacred mysteries.

Offering

The *anamnesis* serves as the basis for a second prayer, known as "the offering," which expresses how in the Mass we have the awesome privilege of offering what Jesus offered on Good Friday. On the Cross, Jesus offered up his sacrifice alone. In the Mass, he offers it with his Church as he invites us to participate in this sacrifice.

> We offer you in thanksgiving
> this holy and living sacrifice. (Eucharistic Prayer III)

As we saw above, we are invited to unite *ourselves* with this sacrifice of Christ, which is why the Eucharistic Prayer calls this not only Christ's sacrifice but also "the oblation of your Church" (Eucharistic Prayer III). And the two sacrifices are really one, since the Church at every Mass participates in the one self-giving act of Christ's offering on the Cross.

The symbolism of the gifts also points to how the Church offers itself to God not on its own but in union with Christ's sacrifice. Recall how the material gifts of bread and wine symbolize a total gift of one's very self. Now after the consecration, those human gifts to God have become the Eucharistic Body and Blood of Christ—the Body and Blood that is offered to the Father. Thus, in Christ, the Church participates in the perfect self-giving love of the Son on the Cross. As the *General Instruction of the Roman Missal* explains,

> In this very memorial, the Church, in particular that gathered here and now, offers the unblemished sacrificial Victim in the Holy Spirit to the Father. The Church's intention, however, indeed, is that the faithful not only offer this unblemished sacrificial Victim but also learn to offer their very selves, and so day by day to be brought, through the mediation of Christ, into unity with God and with each other, so that God may at last be all in all.[73]

Why Abel, Abraham, and Melchizedek?

Eucharistic Prayer I goes on to mention three models of sacrifice from the Bible, asking the Father to accept the Church's offering as he long ago accepted the sacrifices of Abel, Abraham, and Melchizedek:

> … accept them,
> as once you were pleased to accept
> the gifts of your servant Abel the just,
> the sacrifice of Abraham, our father in faith,
> and the offering of your high priest Melchizedek,
> a holy sacrifice, a spotless victim.

Abel, Abraham, Melchizedek. Who were these ancient biblical heroes who lived thousands of years before Christ? And what do they have to do with this moment in the Mass? They are important because each of them offered a sacrifice to God that prefigures what Jesus did in his Passion. And they each point to the kind of self-giving love we should offer God at every Mass, as we unite ourselves to Christ's perfect gift of himself. Step back for a moment and consider what each of these men sacrificed to God.

The most basic of the three sacrifices is found in the mysterious priest-king, Melchizedek, who offered bread and wine to God and blessed Abraham (Genesis 14:18). From the earliest period of Christianity, his

sacrifice has been seen as prefiguring Christ's offering of bread and wine at the Last Supper.

A second level of sacrifice is found in Abel, who reminds us always to give our best to God. Cain and Abel both offered a sacrifice to God. Cain only gave God the fruit from the ground, but Abel was willing to give the Lord his best, sacrificing "the firstlings of his flock and of their fat portions" (Genesis 4:4). God had regard for Abel's generous sacrifice, but not for Cain's.

The third level of sacrifice is found in Abraham. Abraham gave something more than bread, wine, or animals. He was willing to offer God what was most precious to him: his own beloved son, Isaac. And the events surrounding Abraham's sacrifice prefigure Christ's sacrifice on Calvary perhaps more than any other sacrifice in the Old Testament. Genesis 22 tells how Abraham took his beloved only son Isaac to Mount Moriah on a donkey. Isaac carried the wood for the sacrifice up the mountain and was bound on the wood to be offered as a sacrifice for sin. In response to this heroic act of total surrender, God swore that he would bless the whole human family through Abraham's descendants. Many centuries later, God the Father offers up his *beloved only son*, Jesus, in Jerusalem—a city associated with Moriah, the very place where Abraham offered up Isaac (see 2 Chronicles 3:1; Psalm 76:2). Like Isaac, Jesus travels to this place on a donkey, and like Isaac, he carries the wood of the Cross to Calvary. There, like Isaac again, Jesus is bound to the wood and offered as a sacrifice for sin—a sacrifice that brings about the worldwide blessing that God swore to Abraham in Genesis 22.

On Good Friday, therefore, God the Father and God the Son bring to fulfillment what was prefigured by Abraham and Isaac long ago, and God's oath to Abraham that he would bless the human family is realized.

Intercessions

As the Eucharistic Prayers near their conclusion, the priest makes various intercessions. First, he prays for all who will soon be nourished by the Body and Blood of Christ. He prays that we "may become one body, one spirit in Christ" (Eucharistic Prayer III)—an echo of St. Paul's words in 1 Corinthians 10:17: "Because there is one bread, we who are many are one body, for we all partake of the one bread." The priest also prays that our participation in Christ's sacrifice might make us "an eternal offering to you" (Eucharistic Prayer III) or "a living sacrifice" (Eucharistic Prayer IV) echoing St. Paul's exhortation to the Romans: "Present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship" (Romans 12:1).

Second, the priest prays for the Church universal, naming the pope and the local bishop and then interceding for all bishops, clergy, and the entire people of God, both the living and the dead. Some intercessions include a universal scope, interceding for "all who seek you with a sincere heart" (Eucharistic Prayer IV) and praying that the sacrifice of the Mass may "advance the peace and salvation of all the world" (Eucharistic Prayer III).

The Doxology and the Great Amen

The Eucharistic Prayer culminates in an expression of praise that has its roots in the Mass from as early as the second century. And the people respond not just with an ordinary amen but with what is commonly called the Great Amen—and rightly so. For at this sacred moment, the Liturgy invites us to join the chorus of angels and heroes throughout the Bible who joyously affirm their praise of God for his saving work.

What does the word *amen* actually mean? *Amen* transliterates a Hebrew word that was often used in liturgical settings to affirm the validity of what has just been said. For example, when the Levites sing "Blessed be the LORD, the God of Israel, from everlasting to

everlasting," the people join in this blessing of God by exclaiming "Amen!" (1 Chronicles 16:36). When Ezra reads the book of the Law in a solemn ceremony, he concludes by blessing the Lord, and the people answer, "Amen, Amen" (Nehemiah 8:6). St. Paul uses this word in similar ways (see Romans 1:25; Galatians 1:5; Ephesians 3:21) and even concludes some of his letters with an amen (1 Corinthians 16:24; Galatians 6:18).

Most notable is how the angels and saints in heaven cry out "Amen!" as they sing their part in the chorus praising God in the heavenly liturgy. In the book of Revelation, every living creature in heaven and earth and under the earth says, "To him who sits upon the throne and to the Lamb be blessing and honor and glory and might for ever and ever!" And in response, the angelic creatures say "Amen!" as if to shout "Yes! May the Lord be blessed and honored forever!" (Revelation 5:13-14). In another scene, the angels fall down in worship before God's throne, saying, "Amen! Blessing and glory and wisdom and thanksgiving and honor and power and might be to our God for ever and ever! Amen" (Revelation 7:12; see also Revelation 19:4).

This praise of the angels and saints in heaven is echoed on earth by the priest at every Mass when he says,

> 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.

These words themselves have roots in Scripture. They come in part from St. Paul's letter to the Romans: "For from him and through him and to him are all things. To him be glory for ever. Amen" (Romans 11:36). St. Paul also refers to "the unity of the Spirit" in Ephesians 4:3. Here the Liturgy expresses the Trinitarian nature of our worship in the Mass.

We praise the almighty Father best by offering our lives through, with, and in the Son who surrendered himself completely on Calvary, and in the unity of his Spirit who abides in us.

After hearing the priest acclaim that all honor and glory is God's for ever and ever, we respond like the angels, eager to join in this praise of God. We cry out "Amen!" And remember, this is no ordinary amen. In it, we join all the great heroes in salvation history—the Levites, Ezra, St. Paul, and all the angels and saints in heaven—in this chorus of unending praise. No wonder St. Jerome said that this amen in the Mass of the early Christians in Rome "resounded in heaven, as a celestial thunderclap."[74]

Let us not give a passive, robotic amen at this moment. As the priest holds up the Sacred Host and the precious Blood in the chalice, he is presenting to us our God and King, really present here in our midst. So let us join the early Christians and put our whole heart into this Great Amen. Let our response at this moment indeed be a thunderclap resounding in heaven and earth: "Amen!!"