The Eucharistic Prayer

The Eucharistic Prayer or Canon of the Mass is the central prayer of the entire celebration. Most Catholics have been made aware from their earliest days that during the Eucharistic Prayer the bread and wine are transformed into the Body and Blood of Christ. What many Catholics are not aware of, however, is that the Eucharistic Prayer is about more than adoring Christ who becomes present in our midst.

The Church tells us that liturgy (and the Mass is the highpoint and heart of liturgy) is the *action* of Christ the priest and His Body, the Church. In the celebration of Mass, during the Eucharistic Prayer, not only does Christ become present, body and blood, soul and divinity, under the forms of bread and wine, but Christ's saving action, His passion, death and resurrection are once again enacted and offered to the Father by Christ Himself in the person of the priest, and by all present.

This is a truth of enormous significance!. This action of Christ which brought about our redemption from sin and eternal death, offered once for all on Calvary, becomes present again for us, here and now, in this time and place, so that we can join in Christ's perfect offering and can ourselves participate in His perfect worship.

Read carefully any of the Eucharistic Prayers. You will see that that prayer is offered, not to Christ, but to the Father: *Father, you are holy indeed ...; Father, we bring you these gifts ...; Father, we ask you ....* It is worship offered to the Father by Christ as it was at the moment of His passion, death and resurrection, but now it is offered through the priest acting in the person of Christ, and it is offered as well by all of us who are part of Christ's Body, the Church. *This* is the action of Christ's Body, the Church at Mass.

When the priest prays this prayer he prays *we bring you these gifts; we ask you ...; we offer*. That we signifies that all the baptized present at this Eucharistic celebration make this offering in union with Christ, pray this prayer in union with Him. And what is most important, we do not offer Christ alone; we are called to *offer ourselves*, our lives, our individual efforts to grow more like Christ and our efforts as a community of believers to spread God's Word and to serve God's people, to the Father in union with Christ through the hands of the priest. Most wonderful of all, although our offering is in itself imperfect, joined with the offering of Christ it becomes *perfect* praise and thanksgiving to the Father.

And so, during the Eucharistic Prayer at Mass, we have more to do than to look forward to the moment of consecration and remain there while the prayer of the priest continues. Before the consecration we join in the prayer of praise and thanksgiving to the Father known as the Preface and affirm that praise and thanksgiving in our singing of the Holy, Holy, Holy. Following the Consecration we join together in the Memorial Acclamation which proclaims our common faith in Christ's real presence and is an acclamation expressing our gratitude to Christ for His wonderful gift of salvation. But then our prayer moves on and we are called to offer Christ, and ourselves with Christ to the Father: 'We offer to you, Father, this holy and living sacrifice...' and to pray with the priest that 'we who are nourished by His Body and Blood may be filled with the Holy Spirit and become one body, one spirit in Christ...'; we then join our prayers with the prayers of the Blessed Virgin Mary and all the saints for our Holy Father the Pope, our bishops and clergy and all God's people, living and dead. At the conclusion of the Eucharistic Prayer the priest sums up all that has gone before: ' Through Him (Christ), with Him (Christ), in Him 'Christ) in the unity of the Holy Spirit, all glory and honor is yours, almighty Father, forever and ever.' And we who are privileged to make our own offering through, with and in Christ, respond with the most important acclamation of the Mass, the great AMEN by which we profess the action of Christ to be our action as well.