

Year of the Eucharist

October 2004 to October 2005

Part 21 in a series on
The Year of the Eucharist
from
The Office of Rites and Sacraments
Department of Worship & Spiritual Life
Catholic Diocese of Memphis
in Tennessee

The Structure of the Mass

The Liturgy of the Word ... *The Prayer of the Faithful*

Did you know that from the sixth century to Vatican Council II the Church did not include the *Prayer of the Faithful* (*the General Intercessions*) in the liturgy except on Good Friday? And even today, it is the longer Intercessions of Good Friday which more closely mirror this part of the liturgy as it was celebrated in the first six centuries.

Why the *General Intercessions* were dropped is not clear, but the reason for their reappearance is apparent. The documents of Vatican Council II stressed the baptismal priesthood of the laity. And *the Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy*, the first document to come out of the Council in 1964, stressed the importance of the laity exercising their responsibility as a priestly people by participating fully in the celebration of the Mass.

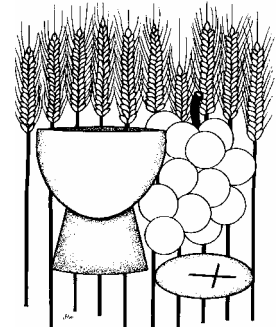
In the *Prayer of the Faithful*, also known as the *General Intercessions* or *Petitions*, all who are baptized share in Christ's priestly intercession for all humanity. Because we are baptized into Christ the High Priest, the joys and hopes, the grief and anguish of the people of our time, especially of those who are poor or afflicted, are *OUR* joys and hopes, and grief and anguish as well (*Lectionary for Mass, #30*).

In the *Prayer of the Faithful* we go far beyond the needs of our own families, our own parish communities, and our own circles of life. As a priestly people, we join with Christ in caring about the needs and the salvation of all peoples.

Sometimes, especially at daily Mass or at the celebration of the liturgy in a smaller setting, such as a retreat, the presider will invite members of the assembly to add their intentions. Even when we add our own petitions, we do so in keeping with the "general" nature of the intercessions. For example, if my grandmother is in a nursing home and suffering illness and loneliness, I would not voice a petition for my grandmother only. Placing my intention within the broader context of concern for all peoples, I might pray, "For all the elderly who are frail in body and spirit, especially for my grandmother, and for all who care for the elderly, we pray to the Lord." Because the celebration of the liturgy is different from my private prayer, the prayer form at liturgy is different from when I pray privately. At liturgy, our prayer is joined to the priestly prayer of Christ who cares for all

Standing at the presider's chair, the priest celebrant opens the *Prayer of the Faithful* by inviting the people to pray, and he closes the intercessions with a brief concluding prayer. The intentions are led by a deacon, another minister, such as a lector or cantor, if sung, or members of the congregation. They are prayed from the ambo or another suitable place.

As we become more like Christ, our circle of concerns does grow wider. As our hearts expand to make room for the needs of more of God's people, we find that we turn to God more often than we formerly did to express our desire and our hope for the good of all. This work of the Holy Spirit in us is a precious gift – one that deserves our attention, our care and our cooperation.



FROM THE
*CONSTITUTION ON THE
SACRED LITURGY, #53...*

In the Prayer of the Faithful, the people respond in a certain way to the word of God which they have welcomed in faith and, exercising the office of their baptismal priesthood, offer prayers to God for the salvation of all. It is fitting that such a prayer be included, as a rule, in Masses celebrated with a congregation, so that petitions will be offered for the holy Church, for civil authorities, for those weighed down by various needs, for all men and women, and for the salvation of the whole world.

The church gives us an orderly format for the Prayer of the Faithful.

"As a rule, the series of intentions is to be:

for the needs of the Church;

for public authorities and the salvation of the whole world;

for those burdened by any kind of difficulty;

for the local community." *General Instruction on the Roman Missal, #70*

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