

Year of the Eucharist

October 2004 to October 2005

The Structure of the Mass

The Liturgy of the Eucharist

The Prayer Over the Gifts

It sounds much like a Jewish prayer, yet we are not in a synagogue, but in our own parish church.

“Blessed are you, Lord, God of heaven and earth. Through your goodness we have this bread to offer, which earth has given and human hands have made. It will become for us the bread of life.”

This is, in fact, like many Christian prayers, modeled after a Jewish table prayer which would have been prayed by the father of the family. A Jewish meal, and especially a paschal meal, was always preceded by a blessing over the bread and wine.

This is the beginning of the Prayer Over the Gifts. If there is no music, as in a typical weekday liturgy, the minister might pray the prayer in an audible voice. If so, the people may respond with the acclamation, “Blessed be God forever.” During the Prayer Over the Gifts, the bread, and then the wine, is raised slightly above the altar for all to see.

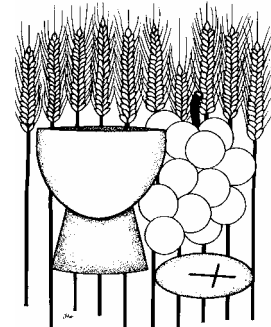
The priest continues, praying inaudibly. After placing the chalice upon the altar, the priest bows profoundly and says quietly, “Lord, God, we ask you to receive us...” Again, while he washes his hands, the priest prays, “Lord, wash away my iniquity...” The people either watch in silence while joining their inner prayer to that of the priest, or they pray the text of a sung hymn of praise or in keeping with the liturgical season.

When I was a child, the *Prayer Over the Gifts* was called the “*Secret*.” The “*Secret*” dates back to the middle ages when the Eucharistic Prayer was prayed very quietly by the priest because it was considered to be the priest’s prayer. Logic dictated that if the Eucharistic Prayer was to be prayed quietly, the prayers preceding it would also be done quietly.

Vatican Council II did more than produce documents which changed the way we do things. The Council gave all of us a new way to see and understand ourselves as church, as the body of Christ on earth. We are a priestly people and the liturgy belongs to everyone. We all have a part, even when we are all silent.

What is our part during the Prayer Over the Gifts? Either through silent or sung prayer, while the gifts are being prepared, we pray in preparation for the Eucharistic Prayer. We pray for openness to hear God’s invitation; we pray for grace to respond by giving ourselves and every aspect of our lives to God again and again; we pray for renewed desire to live more deeply connected to God and to each other. In a real way, the Prayer Over the Gifts is prayer over the bread and wine, and prayer that the gift we are to God will be all that God’s loving will desires us to be.

Part 25 in a series on
The Year of the Eucharist
from
The Office of Rites and Sacraments
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Catholic Diocese of Memphis
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THE LITURGY OF THE EUCHARIST

Preparation of the Gifts Prayer Over the Gifts

The Eucharistic Prayer
Thanksgiving for Salvation
Acclamations
Epiclesis (invoking the Holy Spirit)
Institution Narrative & Consecration
Anamnesis (remembering)
Offering
Intercessions
Doxology (Praise of God)

The Communion Rite
The Lord’s Prayer
The Rite of Peace
The Breaking of the Bread
Communion
Communion Prayer

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