

Year of the Eucharist

October 2004 to October 2005

The Structure of the Mass

The Liturgy of the Eucharist

The Eucharistic Prayer

Overview

“Blessed are you, Lord, our God, king of the world, who has brought bread from heaven.” If the words of this Jewish prayer have a familiar ring, it is because we hear similar words as the priest prays over the gifts at every celebration of the Eucharist.

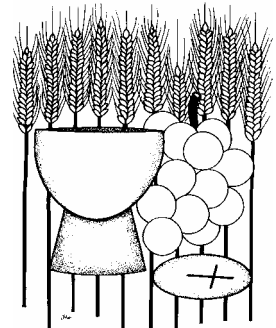
The roots of our Eucharistic Prayer(s) are found in a series of Jewish table blessings. At the beginning of the Jewish family meal, the father or a visiting leader in the community led what was known as the *berekah*. This is a Jewish prayer of blessing which praised and blessed God.

In the Jewish household, after the *berekah* was prayed, the bread was broken and given to each person. Once the bread was shared and most of the meal was eaten, the wine was presented. Praying over the wine, the father or community leader prayed another *berakah* in which God was praised for creation, especially the gift of life, and for the salvation of the Hebrews throughout history. In the third part of the prayer, God was invoked for continued redemption with the expectation that he would soon send the Messiah.

After the death, resurrection and ascension of Jesus, and the sending of the Holy Spirit on Pentecost, the followers of Christ continued to gather for this Sabbath meal. The difference now was that the breaking of the bread and the sharing of the cup were done with a new awareness and a new emphasis. They believed that Jesus was with them and they blessed and broke and shared with awareness of the One who had said, “do this in memory of me.” The prayers of the *berekah* changed to reflect the Christians’ belief that the Messiah had already come. In the first few centuries, as the theology of Eucharist and as Christology developed, there were changes and additions to this Prayer. Eventually references to the life, death and resurrection of Jesus and the promise of everlasting life were incorporated.

Because this was the Eucharistic Prayer used in the Roman Rite it came to be known as the *Roman Canon*. It is believed that it was first written down in Latin during the fourth century, and revised by Pope Gregory the Great in the sixth century. It remained the only Eucharistic Prayer (or Canon) used until Vatican Council II appointed a special committee to study it. The decision was made to retain the Roman Canon without major revisions, and to add three more Eucharistic Prayers as options. The Roman Canon became known as Eucharistic Prayer I, with the others given the designation of Eucharistic Prayer II, III and IV. With the addition of Eucharistic Prayers to be used at Masses with Children, and two Eucharistic Prayers for Reconciliation, today we have a total of ten.

Part 27 in a series on
The Year of the Eucharist
from
The Office of Rites and Sacraments
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ELEMENTS OF THE EUCHARISTIC PRAYER

**PREFACE
(THANKSGIVING)**

**ACCLAMATION
(HOLY, HOLY, HOLY LORD)**

**EPICLESIS
(INVOKING THE HOLY SPIRIT)**

**INSTITUTION NARRATIVE
& CONSECRATION**

**ANAMNESIS
(REMEMBERING)**

OFFERING

INTERCESSIONS

**FINAL DOXOLOGY
(PRAISE OF GOD)**

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