

Year of the Eucharist

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The Year of the Eucharist
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The Office of Rites and Sacraments
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The Structure of the Mass The Liturgy of the Eucharist The Eucharistic Prayer

The *Epiclesis* – The Invoking of the Holy Spirit

Have you ever tried to put into words an experience of awe and wonder? Think of the new parents who lay eyes on their newborn infant for the very first time. They glow, they are breathless, they shed tears, but they do not have adequate words to describe the experience. Birth, death, love, the ocean, mountains and other created wonders defy true and accurate description. There are times when joy and elation, or sorrow and grief are too deep to be expressed in anything but a gasp, a sigh, or hushed silence. At such a time we are moved and we are transformed, but we never really adequately articulate the experience.

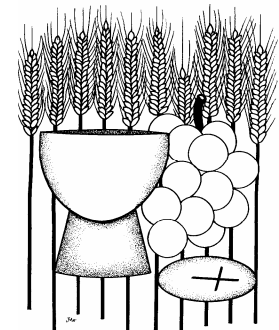
If ever we doubt that mystery is unexplainable, we need only attempt to talk about the mystery of the Eucharist. Mere words simply fail, becoming either too cumbersome or too simplistic to carry such profundity. We don't name a reality *mystery* because it's too difficult to understand. We name it *mystery* because it is too deep, too rich, too sacred, too life-changing and too far above and beyond any other known reality to confine it to human understanding. We may try, but we never quite capture the meaning with mere words.

During the Eucharistic Prayer then, rather than attempting to understand every word and gesture of the priest, it is much better to watch and listen and respond with the heart and the spirit. It is much better to enter into the mystery than to observe and dissect it. Only then do the words of the priest become the words of our own hearts.

Epiclesis: a Greek word in ancient pagan and Christian literature, it signifies the invoking of a name upon a person or thing. In the celebration of the Eucharist, the *Epiclesis* is the invoking of the name of God. During the *Epiclesis*, the priest prays a petition asking the Father to send the Holy Spirit to *sanctify the gifts so that they may become the Body and Blood of the Lord (Eucharistic Prayer IV)*.

We know that Jesus gave his entire life to God the Father. His life and his death were offered – completely given over. *But God raised him up and gave him the name which is above all other names (Philippians 2:9)*. Christ is now the high priest who is present at every celebration of the Eucharist. He invites us to offer ourselves, with him, to the Father. Through the words and actions of the priest, Christ is both the one who offers and the one who is offered. But it is not Christ alone who is offered. We are called to offer ourselves, our lives, to be transformed daily, becoming more like Christ. We are called to offer ourselves as a faith community – the body of Christ on earth – to go forth from the liturgy and share God's love. We are called to go forth and become what we have received.

During the *Epiclesis*, we join our hearts to the words and actions of the priest as he petitions God to make these gifts holy. The bread and wine are the gifts to be changed into the Body and Blood of Christ. We are all the gifts to be made holy and changed into the body of Christ.



FROM
EUCCHARISTIC PRAYER III
Grant that we, who are nourished by his body and blood, may be filled with his Holy Spirit, and become one body; one spirit in Christ.

FROM
EUCCHARISTIC PRAYER IV
And by your Holy Spirit, gather all who share this one bread and one cup into the one body of Christ, a living sacrifice of praise.

Text: Judy Gray
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