

# **First Eucharist**

## **Session 3 – Liturgy of the Eucharist**

### **Goals and Objectives for Session Three**

The goal of Session Three is to form people into an understanding of the Eucharistic prayer and transform them into a people who live this prayer in their lives. The objectives are:

- To enable them to see the TOTALITY of this prayer as the center of the celebration
- To enable them to see this great prayer of praise and thanksgiving as the prayer of the Church (prayed in our name by the priest)
- To empower them to fully participate in the prayer through listening, responding, acclaiming, singing, and posture
- To enable them to make the connection between praying the prayer and living the prayer in their daily lives.

### **The Eucharistic Prayer**

The Liturgy of the Eucharist begins after the Liturgy of the Word. In the Liturgy of the Word the covenant is announced and in the Liturgy of the Eucharist the covenant is renewed. In the Liturgy of the Eucharist the sacrifice and paschal meal instituted by Christ at the last supper is made continuously present in the Church. The Liturgy of the Eucharist has three parts: 1) Preparation of the Altar and the Presentation of the Gifts; 2) the Eucharistic Prayer; 3) Communion Rite.

#### **1. Preparation of the Gifts**

The purpose of the Preparation of the Altar and Presentation of the Gifts is to ready the assembly for the Eucharistic offering which is to follow. The Presentation of the Gifts is rooted in an ancient custom of the Church where the people themselves provided materials for the Eucharist. They also brought forth food for the poor.

Too often people do not see the powerful significance of this part of the Mass. The *Introduction to the Order of Mass* (IOM) explains that “The procession with the gifts is a powerful expression of the participation of all present in the Eucharist and in the social mission of the Church. It is an expression of the humble and contrite heart, the dispossession of self that is a necessary prerequisite for making the true offering which the Lord Jesus gave his people to make with him. The procession with the gifts expresses also our eager willingness to enter into the ‘holy exchange’ with God: ‘accept the offerings you have given us, that we in turn may receive the gift of yourself’” (105).

## **2. Eucharistic Prayer**

The principal focus for conversion catechesis for Session three is the Eucharistic Prayer. The General Instruction of the Roman Missal (GIRM) states: “Now the center and summit of the entire celebration begins: namely, the Eucharistic Prayer, that is, a prayer of thanksgiving and sanctification. The priest invites the people to lift up their hearts to the Lord in prayer and thanks; he unites the congregation with himself in the prayer he addresses in the name of the entire community to God the Father through Jesus Christ in the Holy Spirit. Furthermore, the meaning of the Prayer is that the entire congregation of the faithful should join itself with Christ in confessing the great deeds of God and in offering the sacrifice. The Eucharistic Prayer demands that all listen to it with reverence and in silence” (GIRM, 78).

Unfortunately, catechesis on the Eucharistic Prayer has generally been very weak. Too often people see the prayer as only the prayer of the priest. They do not understand that the priest prays it in our name and they are unaware of the importance of every single part of it.

The liturgical reform after the Second Vatican Council restored its true meaning in the Eucharistic celebration. It especially emphasized three points about the prayer: 1) It is the central prayer of the Mass and of our faith; 2) Every single part of the prayer is important; 3) It is not just the prayer of the priest, but rather the prayer of the Church prayed in our name with one voice by the priest thus actualizing the unity of the Church.

The Eucharistic Prayer “summarizes what it means for the Church to celebrate the Eucharist” (IOM, 111). In and through this prayer we give “praise and thanks for God’s holiness and justice and for all God’s mighty deeds in creating and redeeming the human race, deeds that reached their climax in the incarnation, life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ. In the Eucharistic Prayer the Last Supper is recounted; the mystery of Christ’s passion, saving death, resurrection, and ascension is recalled; the memorial sacrifice of his Body and Blood is offered to the Father; and the Holy Spirit is invoked to sanctify the gifts and transform those who partake of them into the Body of Christ, uniting them with the whole Church of God, living and dead, into one communion of love, service, and praise to the glory of the Father” (IOM, 112).

The Eucharistic Prayer is the great prayer of praise and thanksgiving by which the gifts of bread and wine are transformed into the Body and Blood of Christ. It is also the prayer that sums up who we are as Catholics. By means of this prayer we are formed and transformed into what we pray.

## *The Parts of the Eucharistic Prayer and their Meaning*

**Dialog:** We begin the prayer by lifting up our hearts to the Lord. Here we affirm that we are gathered in Christ as one body and that our entire being is for God.

**Preface/Thanksgiving:** In this prayer of thanksgiving we acknowledge all the great things God has done for us and we give thanks.

**Acclamation (Holy, Holy, Holy):** Here we join ourselves with the angels singing praise to God. Heaven and earth embrace each other in this wonderful prayer of praise. We are truly a people caught up in the love of God.

**Epiclesis:** Here we call upon the life-giving power of the Holy Spirit to hallow the gifts of bread and wine and “make them the Body and Blood of Christ, and to gather those who receive them into a true communion of faith and love” (IOM, 118). We also pray that as the gifts of bread and wine are transformed into the Body and Blood of Christ that we, too, may be transformed.

**Institution Narrative/Consecration:** Here the words and actions of Christ at the Last Supper are repeated in obedience to his command to “Do this in memory of me.” Through the power of the Holy Spirit “these words achieve what they promise and express: the presence of Christ and his sacrifice among his people assembled in his name” (IOM, 119).

**Memorial Acclamation:** Acclamations are shouts of joy. Here the entire assembly proclaims its belief in the “Paschal Mystery of Christ’s death, resurrection, and presence among his people” (IOM, 120).

**Anamnesis and Offering:** We remember the saving deeds God has done in Christ so that their fullness and power may be effective here and now. It is an offering made by the whole Church.

**Intercessions:** We celebrate the Eucharist in communion with the entire Church and are united with all those living and dead. Here we name Mary and the saints who are examples of those who lived the Paschal Mystery in their lives. We pray for the bishop of our diocese and intercede for the living and the dead.

**Doxology:** We conclude the prayer with praise and glory to God. Our “amen” confirms our belief in all that has been prayed in our name.

*(Source: Linda Gaupin, Embracing the Vision: Sacramental Catechesis for First Reconciliation and First Communion)*