

Lesson 17: The Eucharistic Prayer

The Preface and the Sanctus

Our last liturgy lesson focused on the content of the four great Eucharistic prayers, the ones we hear most often in our Masses. Today, we discuss the opening sections of the Eucharistic prayers - the Preface and the Sanctus.

Action:

The priest begins the Eucharistic Prayer with a prayer called the *Preface*. It begins with a dialogue, “**The Lord be with you.**” You respond, “*And with your spirit.*” “**Lift up your hearts.**” “*We lift them up to the Lord.*” “**Let us give thanks to the Lord our God.**” “*It is right and just.*”

With his hands extended in the Orans position, the priest either says or sings the prayer. When sacred names are mentioned in the text, all bow their heads. At the final words of the Preface, he joins his hands and with the people he sings or says the *Sanctus*.

History

Eucharist is a Greek word that means to “give thanks.” The Eucharistic Prayer, also called the anaphora (Greek meaning “offering”) is the very heart of the Mass.

The Preface is very ancient. It goes all the way back to the early Church when we were still a sect within Judaism. Most of the elements of the Preface, including the Holy, Holy, were part of a dialogue inspired by Jewish practice between the president and congregation of the synagogue.

Presently, there are more than eighty different Prefaces in the Churches’ ritual and each one gives a special reason for us to thank God.

The Preface builds up to our joining in praise with all the heavenly hosts and singing with them the great Sanctus, which is Latin for “holy.”

The first part of this very ancient hymn is taken from the prophecy of Isaiah and was used in the liturgy of the synagogue and in the morning office at least by second century. By the year 400 AD the Sanctus was used in the Western Church. The last part of the prayer, “Blessed is He who comes in the name of the Lord,” was the acclamation with which the people greeted Jesus as he entered Jerusalem on the first Palm Sunday.

What you can do to more fully participate in this part of the Mass

The Preface begins with the priest invoking the Lord’s presence upon us (“The Lord be with you”) because we can do nothing without Him. The priest then says, “Lift up your hearts.” Lifting up your hearts means going above and beyond our present problems and difficulties and joining with the heavenly liturgy, where all our troubles will vanish in the twinkling of an eye. “Let us give thanks to the Lord our God.” We do as the Lord has told us — we do it in memory of Him who loved us more than anyone before or since.

In the Holy, Holy, Holy, we join our hearts in praise with all the heavenly hosts, i.e., the angels and saints - including our relatives who are already in heaven, with whom we have joined because we’ve lifted up our hearts to heaven, and are singing with them the great Sanctus, which, again, is Latin for “holy.”

At the end of the Holy, Holy, Holy, we are asked to kneel. This change of posture further emphasizes what the Preface has brought out, that we are to set our focus on God. Kneeling has the effect of changing our level of attention.