



The Holy See

POPE FRANCIS *GENERAL AUDIENCE*

*Paul VI Audience Hall
Wednesday, 7 March 2018*

[Multimedia]

Dear Brothers and Sisters, Good morning!

We are continuing the catecheses on the Holy Mass, and with this catechesis we shall focus on the *Eucharistic Prayer*. The rite of the presentation of the bread and wine having concluded, the *Eucharistic Prayer* begins, which qualifies the celebration of the Mass and constitutes its central moment, ordered to holy Communion.

It corresponds to what Jesus himself did, at the table with the Apostles at the Last Supper, when “he gave thanks” over the bread and then over the cup of wine (cf. Mt 26:27; Mk 14:23; Lk 22:17, 19; 1 Cor 11:24): his thanksgiving lives again each time we celebrate the Eucharist, joining us to his sacrifice of salvation.

And in this solemn Prayer — the Eucharistic Prayer is solemn — the Church expresses what she achieves when she celebrates the Eucharist and the reason why it is celebrated; rather, she makes communion with Christ truly present in the consecrated Bread and Wine. After inviting the people to lift up their hearts to the Lord and to give him thanks, the priest pronounces the Prayer aloud, in the name of all those present, addressing the Father through Jesus in the Holy Spirit. “The meaning of the Prayer is that the entire congregation of the faithful should join with Christ in confessing the great deeds of God and in the offering of Sacrifice” (*General Instruction of the Roman Missal*, 78). And in order to join oneself one needs to understand. For this reason, the Church has wished to celebrate Mass in the language that the people understand, so that each one may join him or herself in this praise and in this great prayer with the priest. In truth, “The sacrifice of Christ and the sacrifice of the Eucharist are one single sacrifice” (*Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 1367).

In the Missal there are different formulations of the Eucharistic Prayer, all constituted of

characteristic elements, which I would like to recall now (cf. ogmr, 79; ccc, 1352-1354). They are all very beautiful. First and foremost there is the *Preface*, which is the *act of thanksgiving* for the gifts of God, in particular for sending his Son as Saviour. The Preface concludes with the *acclamation* of the “Holy”, normally sung. It is beautiful to sing the “Holy”: “Holy, Holy, Holy Lord”. It is beautiful to sing it. The whole assembly joins its voice to that of the Angels and Saints to praise and glorify God.

There is then the invocation of the Spirit, that by his power he consecrate the bread and wine. We invoke the Spirit, that he come and that Jesus may be in the bread and wine. The action of the Holy Spirit and the efficacy of the very words of Christ uttered by the priest make truly present, under the form of bread and wine, his Body and his Blood, his sacrifice offered on the Cross once and for all (cf. ccc, 1375). Jesus was most clear about this. We have heard how Saint Paul, in the beginning, repeated Jesus’ words: “This is my body; this is my blood”. “This is my blood; this is my body”. It was Jesus himself who said this. We should not have odd thoughts: “But, how come something that...”. It is the Body of Jesus; it ends there! Faith: faith comes to our aid; by an act of faith we believe that it is the Body and Blood of Jesus. It is the “mystery of faith”, as we say after the consecration. The priest says: “Mystery of faith”, and we respond with an acclamation. Commemorating the Lord’s death and Resurrection, in expectation of his glorious return, the Church offers the Father the sacrifice which reconciles heaven and earth: she offers the paschal sacrifice of Christ, offering herself with him and asking, by the power of the Holy Spirit, to become “one body, one spirit in Christ” (Eucharistic Prayer iii; *Sacrosanctum Concilium*, 48; ogmr, 79f). The Church wishes to be joined to Christ and become one body and one spirit with the Lord. This is the grace and the fruit of sacramental Communion: we are nourished of the Body of Christ to become, we who eat of it, his Body living today in the world.

This is the mystery of communion; the Church is united to Christ’s offering and his intercession, and in this light, “in the catacombs the Church is often represented as a woman in prayer, arms outstretched in the praying position. Like Christ who stretched out his arms on the cross, through him, with him, and in him, she offers herself and intercedes for all men” (ccc, 1368). The Church which praises, which prays. It is beautiful to think that the Church praises, she prays. There is a passage in the Book of The Acts of the Apostles; when Peter was in prison, it says the Christian community: “prayed earnestly for him”. The Church that prays, the prayerful Church. And when we go to Mass it is to do this: to be a prayerful Church.

The Eucharistic Prayer asks God to welcome all his children in the perfection of love, in union with the Pope and the Bishop, mentioned by name, a sign that we celebrate in communion with the universal Church and with the particular Church. The prayer, like the offering, is presented to God for all the members of the Church, living and departed, in expectation of the blessed hope of sharing the eternal inheritance of heaven, with the Virgin Mary (cf. ccc 1369-1371). No one and nothing is forgotten in the Eucharistic Prayer, but every thing is attributed to God, as is recalled by the doxology which concludes it. No one is forgotten. And if I have someone, relatives, friends,

who are in need or have departed from this world to the other, I can name them at that time, interiorly and silently, or write the name so it may be said aloud. “Father, how much do I have to pay to have my name said there?” — “Nothing”. Is this understood? Nothing! One does not pay for Mass. Mass is Christ’s sacrifice, which is freely given. Redemption is freely given. If you want to make an offering, do so, but it is not paid for. It is important to understand this.

This codified formulation of prayer, perhaps we may feel it to be somewhat distant — it is true, it is an ancient formula — but, if we truly understand the significance, then we will certainly participate better. Indeed it expresses all that we fulfil in the Eucharistic celebration; moreover, it teaches us to cultivate three attitudes that should never be lacking in Jesus’ disciples. The three attitudes: first, learn “*to give thanks, always and everywhere*”, and not only on certain occasions, when all is going well; second, *to make of our life a gift of love*, freely given; third, *to build concrete communion*, in the Church and with everyone. Thus, this central Prayer of the Mass teaches us, little by little, to make of our whole life a “Eucharist”, that is, an act of thanksgiving.

Special greetings:

I greet the English-speaking pilgrims and visitors taking part in today’s Audience, particularly those from England, Lithuania, Vietnam and the United States of America. With prayerful good wishes that this Lent will be a time of grace and spiritual renewal for you and your families, I invoke upon all of you joy and peace in our Lord Jesus Christ. God bless you!

In two days the Winter Paralympic Games will open in the city of PyeongChang, South Korea, which recently hosted the Olympics. These [games] showed how sport can build bridges between countries in conflict and make a valid contribution to the prospects of peace among peoples. The Paralympic Games, even more so, attest that through sport one’s own disabilities can be overcome. The Paralympic athletes are for everyone examples of courage, of perseverance, of tenacity in not letting oneself be defeated by limitations. Sport thus seems to be a great school of inclusion, but also of inspiration for one’s own life and of commitment to transform society.

I extend my greeting to the International Paralympic Committee, to the athletes, to the Authorities and to the Korean people. I assure my prayers that this event may favour days of peace and joy for all.

This *Friday*, in Saint Peter’s Basilica, we will celebrate the penitential liturgy for the traditional *24 Hours for the Lord*.

It is my hope that our churches remain open longer in order to welcome those who wish to prepare themselves for Holy Easter, by celebrating the Sacrament of Reconciliation, and to experience God’s mercy in this way.

I address a cordial welcome to the Italian-speaking faithful. I am pleased to welcome the teacher priests of “Theology of Mission”, the Little Sisters of Divine Providence, the Franciscan Sisters of the Sacred Hearts and the group from the Focolare Movement.

I offer a special thought to *young people, the elderly, the sick and newlyweds*. Dear brothers and sisters, in this penitential time, the Lord reveals the path of hope for you to follow. May the Holy Spirit guide you to achieve a true conversion, so as to rediscover the gift of the Word of God, to be purified of sin and to serve Christ present in our brothers and sisters, according to each one’s abilities and respective roles.