

## Understanding the Mass

### Part 17 in a series

#### Preparation of the gifts

Once the bread and wine have been placed on the altar the deacon, if present, will prepare the chalice of wine. He will pour a drop of water into it while saying this prayer: "By the mystery of this water and wine may we come to share in the divinity of Christ, who humbled himself to share in our humanity." The wine represents divinity and the water our poor humanity. Our humanity will be joined to Christ's divinity in the course of what is to follow.

Scripture tells us that Jesus took the bread and blessed it. Our priest will do the same. The prayers that are used are derivatives of ancient Jewish prayers. Sometimes, if the hymn of preparation is still being sung, the priest will say the blessing prayers quietly. "Blessed are you, Lord God of all creation, for through your goodness we have received the bread we offer you: fruit of the earth and work of human hands, it will become for us the bread of life." If they are said out loud, we respond with, "Blessed be God forever", making his prayer our own. A similar blessing prayer is said over the wine. "Blessed are you Lord God of all creation, for through your goodness we have received the wine we offer you: fruit of the vine and work of human hands, it will become our spiritual drink." "Blessed be God forever."

After this, the priest quietly asks that our sacrifice be pleasing to the Lord and then turns and washes his hands, saying, "Wash me, O Lord, from my iniquity and cleanse me from my sin." (Homework! Read Psalm 51:4 – New American Bible). He then turns and asks us to pray that our sacrifice may be acceptable to God. We do as he asks by responding with "May the Lord accept the sacrifice at your hands for the praise and glory of his name, for our good and the good of all his holy Church." The priest then offers the final prayer called the Prayer over the Offerings. This prayer varies depending on the day or the feast but it always mentions in some way the gifts we have brought and prays for their transformation and ours.

#### The Eucharistic Prayers – *The Preface*

There are multiple Preface prayers that the priest can choose from depending on the particular day in the liturgical calendar. However, each has the same general format.

The Preface is very ancient and goes back to the earliest days of the Church. It is not named Preface because it is a preamble or introduction but because of its Latin meaning – "to proclaim in the presence of." The Eucharistic prayers are addressed to God the Father in his presence and the Preface is the beginning of this series of prayers.

It begins with the priest asking the Lord's presence to be with us. Then we are asked to lift up our hearts. We respond that we lift them up to the Lord. We are declaring that we have put aside all our distractions, our problems, our concerns and have joined ourselves with the Lord! Our priest asks us to give thanks to our Lord and we rightly acknowledge that it is both right and just. The priest will echo these words as the Preface continues.

The prayer continues as the priest, in the name of God's people, thanks and praises the Father for the entire gift of salvation and for some aspect of it celebrated in the feast or season of the day. It concludes with a request of the joining of the heavenly hosts to sing with us a song of praise: the Sanctus – Holy, Holy, Holy. (Homework! Read Isaiah 6:3 and Matthew 21: 9). With this, we are joining with the worship of God in heaven. We are offering praise to Him for what He has done and what we are about to witness during this Mass.

At the end of the Sanctus we kneel. We change our posture to emphasize our shift of attention, our repentance, our submission to God the father, our respect and adoration.