

Understanding the Mass

Part 18 in a series

The Eucharistic Prayer continued

Having just sung the Sanctus (Holy, Holy, Holy) we are now kneeling, placing ourselves in a prayerful posture before our God.

There are four principle prayers in the Roman rite that the priest can choose to use for any particular celebration of the Mass (Eucharistic Prayers I – IV). All of them begin with the dialogue, a Preface and the singing of the Sanctus. Now, the priest will continue with prayers in which he “confesses” God. In other words, he *acknowledges* God’s glory. The language of the Eucharistic Prayers is very concise and specific in its Trinitarian structure. As we listen attentively to the words spoken by the priest we should easily hear how they acknowledge what the *Father* has done for us and His gift of the *Son* and the *Holy Spirit* that He has sent to us.

Our participation from this point forward is very important! Participation is not only saying something or doing something, it is also listening to and following along closely with what is being said and done. We should be giving the priest our undivided attention.

The Epiclesis

The *Epiclesis* is a liturgical term which refers to an invocation to the Father (a petition) that He send the Holy Spirit down upon the Church’s gifts (the bread and the wine). We see at this moment the priest placing his hands over the gifts with his palms down as he says the prayer and then makes the sign of the cross over them with his right hand. This is a very powerful moment as we are asking that God “send down His Spirit upon them like the dewfall, so that they may become for us the body and blood of our Lord Jesus Christ.” The extending of the priest’s hands in this posture is a simple but also very powerful gesture. It is making visible the invisible: the coming of the Spirit into the bread and wine and causing them to become the Body and Blood of Christ. We mark this moment with a single ring of the bells.

The Institutional Narrative – The Consecration

Now we have a narrative of a very specific event from the supper with Jesus’ disciples the night before he died. Two specific moments are recounted, one involving bread and the other wine.

The priest, still “confessing” to God, and doing so before us as we join him in his intention, retells the moment at the supper when Jesus took the bread, said the blessing, broke the bread, and gave it to his disciples saying, “Take this, all of you, and eat of it, for this is my body, which will be given up for you.” Similar words are spoken over the wine as the Chalice is presented, “Take this, all of you and drink from it...” Our priest genuflects in adoration before the bread and wine because the Holy Spirit has come, and with the saying of the words of Jesus, the bread and wine have been transformed into the Body and Blood of our Lord Jesus Christ. As we kneel in adoration before our Lord, we can acclaim as St. Thomas did when confronted with the risen Lord, “My Lord and my God.” (Homework! Read John 20: 24 – 29) We mark the moment of consecration of the bread and the wine with three rings of the bells; a Trinitarian gesture of respect. In ancient times, the bells were rung to let the congregation know the moment of consecration as they may not have been able to see this action by the priest.

By the sacramental act of Transubstantiation, the substance of the bread and wine has been changed into the substance of the Body and Blood of Christ. We accept this by faith. (Homework! Research "Transubstantiation")