

Understanding the Mass

Part 20 in a series

The Eucharistic Prayer is complete. Christ is present with us in the Host and Precious Blood. We are standing now, having just given our affirmation of the Doxology with a great Amen! We now move to the portion of the Mass known as *The Rite of Communion*. It consists of the Lord's Prayer, the Rite of Peace, the Breaking of the Bread, the Distribution and Reception of Communion and lastly, the Prayer after Communion.

The Lord's Prayer ("Oratio Dominica")

This prayer was given to us by Christ. When he was asked by his disciples to teach them to pray, this was his response. The *Compendium of the Catechism of the Catholic Church* describes it this way: "It is this prayer of Christ which sustains all our prayers, those spoken and those in the heart. When the Church prays it, it is the Son who embraces the knees of the Father." What a beautiful way to envision this prayer being said!

It consists of 7 petitions made to God the Father. The first three draw us toward him for his glory: Sanctification of His name, The coming of His kingdom, and Fulfillment of His will. The last four present our wants and needs. We ask God to: Feed us, Forgive us, Keep us free from temptations and Free us from Satan and his works.

We say this prayer so often that it's possible we do so without full consideration of what we are saying. Tertullian, a second century Church Father, said that it "is truly the summary of the whole gospel." St. Thomas Aquinas called it "the most perfect of prayers." Homework! I encourage you to get a copy of the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* and read paragraphs 2759 – 2854 (You can check one out of the Church library at the office if you do not wish to purchase one or it can be found on-line). It is an excellent presentation of each part of the Lord's Prayer and will help you understand better the meaning of what you are praying each week in Mass.

After the last petition the Priest prays an extended request and reiteration of our deliverance, "Deliver us, Lord, we pray, from every evil, graciously grant peace in our days, that, by the help of your mercy, we may be always free from sin and safe from all distress, as we await the blessed hope and the coming of our Savior, Jesus Christ." We respond with our own Doxology, singing the glories of God, "For the kingdom, the power and the glory are yours, now and forever!"

The Rite of Peace

The priest now addresses Jesus directly, asking him to grant us "peace and unity". He then turns to us and offers us the peace of Christ and we in turn offer it back to him ("and with your spirit"). We are then asked to offer each other a sign of peace. It is more than just a greeting that we offer to our neighbor. We have just prayed that God forgive us as we forgive others. Now, with a total expression of love for our brothers and sisters we, as members of the Body of Christ, offer a sign of peace and reconciliation before moving forward to receive "our daily bread" as we requested.