

THE EUCHARISTIC PRAYER

PART TWO: THE PREFACE AND ITS GREAT INTRODUCTORY DIALOGUE

The *Great* Introductory Dialogue:

The *Great Introductory Dialogue* opens the Preface, the Canon's initial prayer of praise and thanksgiving. There is good reason for calling the Dialogue *Great*. This initial exchange between the priest-celebrant and the baptized faithful is clear evidence that the Eucharistic Prayer, the center and summit of the entire celebration, belongs, not only to the priest, but to the entire Assembly. The exhortation *Let us give thanks to the Lord our God* expresses the union of the priest-celebrant, with the people in this sacred action, and what is even more important, expresses our oneness with Christ as he praises God's wonderful deeds, and offers Sacrifice

What does the Dialogue mean?

The priest's greeting, *The Lord be with you*, expresses more than a personal sentiment of good will toward those present. It makes a theological statement; it is a prayer that those present will continue to share in the salvation given them by the Lord in Baptism. The response of the people expresses the same prayer for the one who will speak and act in the person of Christ during the proclamation of the Eucharistic prayer. In this way all present, priest and faithful, are reminded of their Baptism, and the unity with Christ and with one another given them by this sacrament. For the non-ordained faithful it also recalls the share in the priesthood of Christ given at Baptism, the priesthood which makes it possible for them to participate in this sacred action surpassing all others.

Following this initial greeting, the priest-celebrant calls all present to *Lift up your hearts*, that is, to raise their hearts in thanksgiving and praise to God. This is a reminder that as they enter this moment of prayer, their thoughts should be raised on high, or, in the words of St. Paul, they should *seek the things that are above*. The priest then invites the faithful to

enter into the Eucharistic prayer itself: *Let us give thanks to the Lord our God*. To this invitation, the faithful respond: It is *right and just*. The wording of this response is a new and more accurate translation of the Latin *dignum et justum est*. Fundamentally, it is a statement of agreement with what is about to be done, a kind of seal of approval which expresses not only agreement, but also the determination to take part in the solemn action.

The Preface - Praise and Thanksgiving:

We know that praise and thanksgiving is central to the Eucharistic Prayer. It is the purpose of the Preface to express our motives for this thanksgiving. The reasons for giving thanks to God are infinite and ultimately inexpressible, however, in the Prefaces the Church singles out some from among this infinite number. There are more than eighty Preface texts, each one drawing its inspiration from evidence of God's goodness: the saving events in the life of Christ; the example of our Blessed Mother and the saints, as well as some of the many actions of grace expressing God's love and care. This thanksgiving is not the routine gratitude of everyday life. It is profound spiritual gratitude offered to the Father by Christ, true God and true man, on behalf of the brothers and sisters with whom he shares humanity and for whom he died and rose from the dead. It is our privilege, through the priest-celebrant, to enter into this solemn thanksgiving of Christ.

In every Preface, whatever its theme, God is thanked finally and above all for the gift of his only Son who, of his own free will offered himself to gain our salvation. And always the Preface concludes with the hymn, the *public acclamation*:

*Holy, Holy, Holy Lord God of Hosts.
Heaven and earth are full of your glory...*