

(Nine years ago, I wrote a 12 part reflection on the Eucharistic Prayers of the Mass. I have updated that reflection and offer it to you now for your prayerful consideration. I hope that this reflection helps your celebration of the Eucharist. Fr. Jim Benz)

A PERSONAL REFLECTION ON THE EUCHARISTIC

PRAYERS OF THE MASS: PART ONE 6/21

By Father Jim Benz

One of my most unique possessions is what is called a "gospel parallel." We are all used to reading the Gospels in our Bibles, but this one particular rendition of the Gospels is most unique because, rather than printing the Gospels one after another in the traditional format of Matthew, then Mark, then Luke, and then John, this "gospel parallel" shows them side by side in columns. In other words, it shows the Genealogy of Jesus as found in Matthew printed right next to that as found in Luke. Or also it lists the first appearance of St. John the Baptist all printed right next to each other in four columns. It really is a great help in comparing the Gospels to one another.

What I plan to do in this series of reflections is to follow that format, putting certain sections of the various Eucharistic Prayers right next to each other so that we can better compare them and better appreciate the uniqueness of each one.

The actress Julie Andrews in the musical The Sound of Music sings, "Let's start at the very beginning, a very good place to start. When you read you begin with A-B-C, when you sing you begin with Do-Re-Mi....." When it comes to the Eucharistic Prayers of the Mass, we begin with a section called the Preface. According to the dictionary, a "preface" is a "forward," a "preamble," an "introduction," a "prologue," or a "prelude." The Preface at Mass is like the overture of a musical. Let's go back again to The Sound of Music. If one listens closely to that musical introduction which takes place at the very beginning of that particular musical, one will hear parts of the melodies that make this Rodgers and Hammerstein collaboration one of the most beloved musicals of all time.

So too with Prefaces of the Mass. Each of them is a "forward," a "preamble," an "introduction," a "prologue," a "prelude" to what one will hear in the rest of the Eucharistic Prayer. The main theme of each of the ten to thirteen (depending on how one counts) is simply "thanks and praise." What you will find below are four of those Prefaces. Please read each one closely, reflectively, prayerfully. Note the wonder of God's love for us which each of them proclaims. Is it any wonder they lead us to proclaim with all our hearts, "Holy, holy, holy, Lord"?

Eucharistic Prayer II: It is truly right and just, our duty and our salvation, always and everywhere to give you thanks, Father most holy, through your beloved Son, Jesus Christ, your Word through whom you made all things, whom you sent as our Savior and Redeemer, incarnate by the Holy Spirit and born of the Virgin. Fulfilling your will and gaining for you a holy people, he stretched out his hands as he endured his Passion, so as to break the bonds of death and manifest the resurrection. And so, with the Angels and all the Saints we declare your glory, as with one voice we acclaim:

Eucharistic Prayer IV: It is truly right to give you thanks, truly just to give you glory, Father, most holy, for you are the one God living and true, existing before all ages and abiding for all eternity, dwelling in unapproachable light; yet you, who alone are good, the source of life, have made all that is, so that you might fill your creatures with blessings and bring joy to many of them by the glory of your light. And so, in your presence are countless hosts of Angels, who serve you day and night and, gazing upon the glory of your face, glorify you without ceasing. With them we, too, confess your name in exultation, giving voice to every creature under heaven as we acclaim:

Masses for Reconciliation I: It is truly right and just that we should always give you thanks, Lord, holy Father, almighty and eternal God. For you do not cease to spur us on to possess a more abundant life and, being rich in mercy, you constantly offer pardon and call on sinners to trust in your forgiveness alone. Never did you turn away from us, and, though time and again we have broken your covenant, you have bound the human family to yourself through Jesus your Son, our Redeemer, with a new bond of love so tight that it can never be undone. Even now you set before your people a time of grace and reconciliation, and, as they turn back to you in spirit, you grant them hope in Christ Jesus and a desire to be of service to all, while they entrust themselves more fully to the Holy Spirit. And so, filled with wonder, we extol the power of your love, and, proclaiming our joy at the salvation that comes from you, we join in the heavenly hymn of countless hosts, as without end we acclaim:

A PERSONAL REFLECTION ON THE EUCHARISTIC PRAYERS OF THE MASS: PART TWO 6/28

By Father Jim Benz

Several years ago, Deacon Frank Prideaux and his wife, Barb, made a trip to Yellowstone National Park. What a wonderful place to visit with its geysers, lakes, mountain vistas, and, last but not least, the Yellowstone River with its fantastic falls. If you've ever seen those falls, you will never forget them. It's much like Niagara Falls or any sort of majestic cascade of water. The water just keeps on coming and coming and coming. If you can picture any sort of water fall you've seen, then you have a visual picture of what the Eucharistic Prayers and, in particular, what the Preface of these prayers is all about: a cascade of praise and thanks! In case you missed my introduction to this series of reflections last Sunday, I spoke about a book I have that prints the Gospels in columns side-by-side so that the themes they commonly share can be better compared and appreciated. I mentioned here that I plan to do this very same thing with the themes we find in the Eucharistic Prayers. Last weekend I also followed Julie Andrews' lead in musical The Sound of Music by "starting at the very beginning" in focusing on several of the Prefaces from various Eucharistic Prayers. Last weekend I printed here the Prefaces from Eucharistic Prayers II and IV along with those from the two Masses of Reconciliation.

Today, I have copied three of four Prefaces from what is called "the Eucharistic Prayer for Various Needs and Occasions." In a sense, this one prayer could be looked upon as four different Eucharistic Prayers because, while at times the four of them share common wording, in other parts each has its own wording in keeping with each prayer's subtitle. Please note the subtitles below, and please look for those thematic elements in each prayer and how well those elements tie into that subtitle.

Once more, I would ask that you please read each one closely, slowly, reflectively, and prayerfully. Again, note the wonder of God's love for us which each of them proclaims. Notice the outpouring, the cascade, of praise and thanks, which is the essential and central element in each Eucharistic Prayer. Again, is it any wonder that they each lead us to proclaim with all our hearts, "Holy, holy, holy, Lord...."?

Eucharistic Prayer for Various Needs and Occasions I: "The Church on the Path to Unity"

It is truly right and just to give you thanks and raise to you a hymn of glory and praise, O Lord, Father of infinite goodness. For by the word of your Son's Gospel you have brought together one Church from every people, tongue, and nation, and, having filled her with life by the power of your Spirit, you never cease through her to gather the whole human race into one. Manifesting the covenant of your love, she dispenses without ceasing the blessed hope of your Kingdom and shines bright as the sign of your faithfulness, which in Christ Jesus our Lord you promised would last for eternity. And so, with all the Powers of heaven, we worship you constantly on earth, while, with all the Church, as one voice we acclaim:

Eucharistic Prayer for Various Needs and Occasions II: "God Guides His Church along the Way of Salvation"

It is truly right and just, our duty and our salvation, always and everywhere to give you thanks, Lord, holy Father, creator of the world and source of all life. For you never forsake the works of your wisdom, but by your providence are even now at work in our midst. With mighty hand and outstretched arm you led your people Israel through the desert. Now, as your Church makes her pilgrim journey in the world, you always accompany her by the power of the Holy Spirit and lead her along the paths of time to the eternal joy of your Kingdom, through Christ our Lord. And so, with the Angels and Saints, we, too, sing the hymn of your glory, as without end we acclaim:

Eucharistic Prayer for Various Needs and Occasions III: "Jesus, the Way to the Father"

It is truly right and just, our duty and our salvation, always and everywhere to give you thanks, holy Father, Lord of heaven and earth, through Christ our Lord. For by your Word you created the world and you govern all things in harmony. You gave us the same Word made flesh as Mediator, and he has spoken your words to us and called us to follow him. He is the way that leads us to you, the truth that sets us free, the life that fills us with gladness. Through your Son you gather men and women, whom you made for the glory of your name, into one family, redeemed by the Blood of his Cross and signed with the seal of the Spirit. Therefore now and for ages unending, with all the Angels, we proclaim your glory, as in joyful celebration we acclaim:

**A PERSONAL REFLECTION ON THE EUCHARISTIC
PRAYERS OF THE MASS: PART THREE 7/5**

By Father Jim Benz

Some years ago, the author Stephen Covey wrote a phenomenally best selling book entitled The Seven Habits of Highly Effective People. I'm sure that many of us have read it, possibly even doing so several times. The second habit he enumerates is, "Begin with the end in mind," in other words, as you proceed onward through some task, keep in mind where you want to wind up in the end.

It might seem a little odd for me to speak now about the end of the Eucharistic Prayer. For the past two weeks, I have focussed on its beginning even quoting Julie Andrews in The Sound of Music, "Let's start at the very beginning, a very good place to start." However, the Eucharistic Prayer is like a sandwich. The first layer of bread is the Preface which we've been focussing on for the last two weeks. The second layer of bread is what is called the "**Great Amen**," the acclamation that ends the Eucharistic Prayer.

If that simple four-letter word "amen" is to balance what we find in the Preface, it's extremely important that we know what that word "amen" means. According the Merriam-Webster OnLine, "amen" means "to express solemn ratification (as of an expression of faith) or hearty approval (as of an assertion)." In other words, "amen" means not a little whispered, flimsy, mousy, apologetic, "excuse me," #8 font "yes" but a 24 carat gold-leafed, neon

lighted, diamond-encrusted, blood-curdling #28 font **"yes"** that makes the earth quake when we sing it. In other words, this word means, "I proclaim it with all my heart" and again "I bet my life on it!"

Now, of course, we have quite a distance to go in our looking at the Eucharistic Prayer of the Mass with this being only the third of these reflections. Yet I want to mention this "second layer of bread" now because, if we are giving such a "solemn ratification" or "hearty approval" to what the Eucharistic Prayer proclaims, we need to "have the end in mind" as we look at the various elements that make up the "meat" of the sandwich. Indeed, how can we proclaim an enthusiastic, full-throated, love-dripping, faith-inspiring "ratification" and "hearty approval" at the end of this prayer unless we are aware of what is being proclaimed throughout the whole of it?

As important as this single word is, there are, in fact, other opportunities to show our praise and acclaim for the God whose love we focus on in this prayer. The "Holy, Holy, Holy" with its Hosannas (a Hebrew word which itself is "a cry of acclamation and adoration," again according to Merriam-Webster OnLine) and its statements of "Heaven and earth are full of your glory" and "Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord" is one such acclamation. The various Memorial Acclamations after the Institution Narrative (Consecration) also proclaim our praise of that same loving God with their chants of "We Proclaim your Death, O Lord, and profess your Resurrection until you come again," "When we eat this Bread and drink this Cup, we proclaim your Death, O Lord, until you come again," and "Save us, Savior of the world, for by your Cross and Resurrection you have set us free." Notice as well that the First Eucharistic Prayer (or "Roman Canon") has five little "amens" encapsulated (or might we say "embedded"?) in its wording. These "amens" are surrounded by brackets nowadays along with the phrase "through Christ our Lord." They are like arrow heads, shards of pottery, or artifacts found at an archaeological site. While they aren't used now, they are reminders of an earlier age when even that particular "older" Eucharistic Prayer was filled with sung acclamations.

What you will find below are the ending words or the "doxology" that is shared by and concludes all of our Eucharistic Prayers. Having looked at the first layer of bread, look again at the second layer of bread in the sandwich that is the Eucharistic Prayer so that you might be better prepared to look at the "meat" beginning next week:

Through him, and with him, and in him, O God, almighty Father, in the unity of the Holy Spirit, all glory and honor is yours, for ever and ever. Amen!

A PERSONAL REFLECTION ON THE EUCHARISTIC PRAYERS OF THE MASS: PART FOUR 7/12

By Father Jim Benz

As I've mentioned many times before, I'm a devoted reader of the comics in the Post-Dispatch. Again, I love the humor and creativity I find in them, but, even more so, I love the wisdom I find in those comics. Several years ago, I clipped a particular strip written by the now-deceased cartoonist Jeff McNally. His strip was entitled "Shoe" and was about talking birds. A couple of the regulars in that strip were "the Professor," an old and wise eagle-like bird who always wore a smoking jacket, and his nephew Skyler. One day Skyler was watching television. He said to the Professor, "I can't imagine life without television." The Professor shot back, "That's because you have no imagination." The Professor's comment was quite to the point. It prompts us to ask ourselves: have I let television (or anything for that matter) rob me of my ability to imagine, to wonder, to appreciate, to see in my mind's eye, to be in awe of all that surrounds me, especially as it mirrors God's love for me, for us?

The Greek word "liturgia" means "a public work," a work that identifies to the worker. For instance, the "liturgia" of a bricklayer is laying brick. The "liturgia" of a teacher is teaching. The "liturgia" of a farmer is farming. Another Greek word "eucharistia" means simply "thankfulness; gratitude." If we combine those words in the phrase, "Liturgy of the Eucharist," the second major part of the Mass, we are saying that we find our identity as Christians in the work of giving thanks. (By the way, when we speak of the first major part of the Mass as being the "Liturgy of the Word," we are saying that we also find our identity as Christians in the Word of God.)

It seems to me that so often we are like Skyler in the "Shoe" comic strip of some years ago. We have so much around us that is so wonderful and miraculous, yet we take it all for granted. The list of the items taken for granted is endless: for example, good health, the air we breathe, the balance that enables us to walk, the warmth and brightness of the Sun, the people who love us, the water we drink, the ability to think, even the electricity and the computers like the one I'm typing on right now. We just don't see them as the wonders that they are. If we take such items for granted and don't appreciate what we see and use everyday, how much so do we take for granted and fail to see God's love that is even more a part of us than are any of those other items? The key to celebrating the Mass well is the ability to be grateful. If we are not grateful, we will not be able to celebrate the Eucharist. Please note how the following parts of these two Eucharistic prayers open our eyes to the "wonderful works of God."

Eucharistic Prayer IV: We give you praise, Father most holy, for you are great, and you have fashioned all your works in wisdom and in love. You formed man in your own image and entrusted the whole world to his care, so that in serving you alone, the Creator, he might have dominion over all creatures. And when through disobedience he had lost your friendship, you did not abandon him to the domain of death. For you came in mercy to the aid of all, so that those who seek might find you. Time and again you offered them covenants and through the prophets taught them to look forward to salvation. And you so loved the world, Father most holy, that in the fullness of time you sent your Only Begotten Son to be our Savior. Made incarnate by the Holy Spirit and born of the Virgin Mary, he shared our human nature in all things but sin. To the poor he proclaimed the good news of salvation, to prisoners, freedom, and to the sorrowful of heart, joy. To accomplish your plan, he gave himself up to death, and, rising from the dead, he destroyed death and restored life. And that we might live no longer for ourselves but for him who died and rose again for us, he sent the Holy Spirit from you, Father, as the first fruits for those who believe, so that, bringing to perfection his work in the world, he might sanctify creation to the full.

Eucharistic Prayer for Children I: God our Father, you have brought us here together so that we can give you thanks and praise for all the wonderful things you have done. We thank you for all that is beautiful in the world and for the happiness you have given us. We praise you for daylight and for your word which lights up our minds. We praise you for the earth, and all the people who live on it, and for our life which comes from you. We know that you are good. You love us and do great things for us. Father, you are always thinking about your people; you never forget us. You sent your Son Jesus, who gave his life for us and who came to save us. He cured sick people; he cared for those who were poor and wept with those who were sad. He forgave sinners and taught us to forgive each other. He love everyone and showed us how to be kind. He took children in his arms and blessed them. God our Father, all over the world your people praise you.

**A PERSONAL REFLECTION ON THE EUCHARISTIC
PRAYERS OF THE MASS: PART FIVE 7/19**

By Father Jim Benz

Are you familiar with the Christmas song, "Mary, Did You Know," as sung in a duet by Kenny Rogers and Wyonna Judd? It is truly one of the most haunting and moving songs that I think I have ever heard. I saved it as one of my "favorites" on my list of web sites and happened to come across it the other day. Even though I hadn't listened to it since last Christmas and even though we are months away from the Christmas season, hearing it again ran chills down my spine. If you have internet access and have never heard the song or have not listened to it recently, I would ask that you immediately put this bulletin down and listen to it at the following web site:

<<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=AQM2rszMAfY>>

The lyrics as penned by Mark Lowry are as follows: *Mary, did you know that your baby boy would one day walk on water? Mary, did you know that your baby boy would save our sons and daughters? Did you know that your baby boy has come to make you new; the child that you delivered will soon deliver you? Mary, did you know that your baby boy will give sight to a blind man? Mary, did you know that your baby boy will calm the storm with His hand? Did you know that your baby boy has walked where angels trod? When you kiss your little baby, you kiss the face of God! Oh Mary, did you know? Oh Mary, did you know? The blind will see, the deaf will hear the dead will live again. The lame will leap, the dumb will speak the praises of the Lamb. Mary, did you know that your baby boy is Lord of all creation? Mary, did you know that your baby boy will one day rule the nations? Did you know that your baby boy is Heaven's perfect Lamb? The sleeping child you're holding is the great I Am! Mary, did you know?*

What a beautiful cascade of thoughts about Jesus and his mother, Mary! If we can appreciate the beautiful litany that that song is, then we can appreciate "the wonderful works of God." Once again, you will notice the first parts of several Eucharistic Prayers below. These words would come right after the singing of the Holy, Holy, Holy. Some of them are direct and to the point. Others are more expansive and colorfully descriptive. Once more, I would ask that you read them slowly, prayerfully, and reflectively in order to better appreciate and to better drink in the ever-present and always-dependable love of God for us.

Eucharistic Prayer I:

To you, therefore, most merciful Father, we make humble prayer and petition through Jesus Christ, your Son, our Lord.

Eucharistic Prayer II:

You are indeed Holy, O Lord, the fount of all holiness.

Eucharistic Prayer III:

You are indeed Holy, O Lord, and all you have created rightly gives you praise, for through your Son our Lord Jesus Christ, by the power and working of the Holy Spirit, you give life to all things and make them holy, and you never cease to gather a people to yourself, so that from the rising of the sun to its setting a pure sacrifice may be offered to your name.

Masses for Reconciliation I:

You are indeed Holy, O Lord, and from the world's beginning are ceaselessly at work, so that the human race may become holy, just as you yourself are holy. (*an additional comment: think about what that is saying, that God is helping us to be as divine as he is divine!*).

Masses for Reconciliation II:

You, therefore, almighty Father, we bless through Jesus Christ your Son, who comes in your name. He himself is the Word that brings salvation, the hand you extend to sinners, the way by which your peace is offered to us. When we ourselves had turned away from you on account of our sins, you brought us back to be reconciled, O Lord, so that, converted at last to you, we might love one another through your Son, whom for our sake you handed over to death.

Eucharistic Prayer for Various Needs and Occasions I-IV:

You are indeed Holy and to be glorified, O God, who love the human race and who always walk with us on the journey of life. Blessed indeed is your Son, present in our midst when we are gathered by his love, and when, as once for the disciples, so now for us, he opens the Scriptures and breaks the bread. (*an additional note: it is proclaiming the personal and real presence of Christ through the proclamation of the Word as well as the Eucharist*).

A PERSONAL REFLECTION ON THE EUCHARISTIC PRAYERS OF THE MASS: PART SIX 7/26

By Father Jim Benz

Before you begin reading this reflection, I'd ask you to take a deep breath. Let the air fill your lungs. After exhaling, take another, and then another. Visualize all that life-giving oxygen filling you with new vitality. Then imagine what it would be like to be afflicted with emphysema or some sort of other pulmonary disorder. Imagine what it would be like to be gasping for air after almost drowning. Is it any wonder that, without the air, we die?

Such is the power of the Holy Spirit. While we English-speakers have the two separate words "breath" and "spirit," both Hebrew and Greek only have one word to describe both concepts. In Hebrew, it's the word "ruah," while in Greek, it's the word "pneuma." For this reason, when God breathes into Adam the breath of life in Book of Genesis (2:7), God is breathing into him not only physical air, but he is also breathing into him his own life, his spirit. Similarly, in John's Gospel (20:22-23), we see that dual meaning when Jesus breathes upon the apostles and says, "Receive the Holy Spirit..." In other words, the Holy Spirit is as important to us, the Church, the living Body of Christ on earth, as breath is to our human bodies.

After the first several words of praise in the body of each Eucharistic Prayer, the priest extends his hands palms down over the bread and wine and calls upon the Holy Spirit. As the Church says in its General Instruction on the Roman Missal (#79), by that gesture, "the Church implores the power of the Holy Spirit that the gifts offered by human hands be consecrated, that is, become Christ's Body and Blood, and that the unblemished Victim to be received in Communion be for the salvation of those who will partake of it." Our Catholic tradition shares this action and prayer with the Churches of the Orthodox tradition. However, the Eastern Orthodox Churches go so far as to believe that this action of calling down the Holy Spirit is what we call the Consecration of the Mass. In other words, without it, the Orthodox believe that the bread and wine remain just bread and wine. While we believe that the Transubstantiation of the elements happens later, still we would agree with them that this calling down of the Holy Spirit upon the gifts is an extremely important part of every Eucharistic Prayer.

Please again take some time to prayerfully reflect on this invocation in the prayers below. Again, note how some of them are direct and to the point while others are more expansive and colorfully descriptive.

Eucharistic Prayer for Children I: We bring you bread and wine and ask you to send your Holy Spirit to make these gifts the body and blood of Jesus your Son. Then we can offer to you what you have given to us.

Eucharistic Prayer for Children II: God our Father, we now ask you to send your Holy Spirit to change these gifts of bread and wine into the body and blood of Jesus Christ, our Lord.

Eucharistic Prayer for Children III: Father, we ask you to bless these gifts of bread and wine and make them holy. Change them for us into the body and blood of Jesus Christ, your Son.

Eucharistic Prayer for Various Needs and Occasions I-IV: Therefore, Father most merciful, we ask that you send forth your Holy Spirit to sanctify these gifts of bread and wine, that they may become for us the Body and Blood of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Masses for Reconciliation I: Look, we pray, upon your people's offerings and pour out on them the power of your Spirit, that they may become the Body and Blood of your beloved Son, Jesus Christ, in whom we, too, are your sons and daughters.

Masses for Reconciliation II: Celebrating the reconciliation Christ has brought us, we entreat you: sanctify these gifts by the outpouring of your Spirit, that they may become the Body and Blood of your Son, whose command we fulfill when we celebrate these mysteries.

Eucharistic Prayer II: Make holy, therefore, these gifts, we pray, by sending down your Spirit upon them like the dewfall, so that they may become for us the Body and Blood of our Lord, Jesus Christ.

Eucharistic Prayer III: Therefore, O Lord, we humbly implore you: by the same Spirit graciously make holy these gifts we have brought to you for consecration, that they may become the Body and Blood of your Son our Lord Jesus Christ at whose command we celebrate these mysteries.

Eucharistic Prayer IV: Therefore, O Lord, we pray: may this same Holy Spirit graciously sanctify these offerings, that they may become the Body and Blood of our Lord Jesus Christ for the celebration of this great mystery, which he himself left us as an eternal covenant.

A PERSONAL REFLECTION ON THE EUCHARISTIC PRAYERS OF THE MASS: PART SEVEN 8/2

By Father Jim Benz

"What year is it?" "Where are we?" "Who is that standing around us?" Those sound like the questions an EMT might ask of a person who has been involved in a serious accident. Of course, it's 2015. Of course, we are in St. Charles, Missouri. Of course, we are surrounded by our friends and family. These are really easy questions to answer. However, when we celebrate the Eucharist, those answers no longer apply. For when we celebrate the Eucharist, it is no longer 2015, but it is now 33 A.D. When we celebrate the Eucharist, we are no longer in St. Charles, Missouri, but we are now in the city of Jerusalem. When we celebrate the Eucharist, we are no just surrounded by friends and family, but we are surrounded by all the saints of the Church. There, over there is Mary! There, over there are Peter and John! There's Theresa of Avila! There's Francis of Assisi! There, over there is Mother Theresa of Calcutta! In fact, whenever we celebrate the Eucharist, all the saints are with us at the altar.

Now before you call the Archbishop to let him know I've been sipping the cooking sherry, let me explain. In the Feast of Passover, our Orthodox Jewish brothers and sisters believe that they are mystically linked with Moses and the ancient Israelites at the foot of Mount Sinai as the Mosaic Covenant is being fashioned. Whenever they celebrated the Passover meal "**in memory of**" the Exodus covenant, they believe the blood, which Moses sprinkled on the altar representing God and on the whole community of Israel, is being sprinkled on them! And, by that meal, they are made members of the Old Covenant, even though they are thousands of years separated from that one central event of their faith. Jesus, being a good Jew, knew what the Passover meant to his fellow Jews, but he made one change. At the Last Supper, Jesus celebrated a Passover meal with his Apostles. However, rather than saying that this particular Passover meal was to put them into direct contact with the events of the Exodus, he said, "Do this (meal) **in memory of me**." By these words, he meant that, through this meal, we are put in direct contact with the events that made the New Covenant! By these words, he meant that we are there at the foot of the Cross with Mary and John on that first Good Friday, that we are there in the Garden on that first Easter Sunday! By these words, he meant that we are made members of the New Covenant, even though we are thousands of years separated from this one central event of our faith!

One comment about the word "covenant." To our older brothers and sisters, the Jewish people, the word "covenant" meant a blending or joining of lives. As a child of the "fifties," I remember the television show "Broken Arrow" in which the central theme was how the Apache Indian Cochise had become the blood-brother of the Indian Agent Tom Jeffords and how an attack on one was an attack on the other. Through the cutting of their wrists and their wrists being roped together, their two lives had been inseparably joined, had been blended, had been made to be one life. They had entered into a covenant with each other. Through the blood of oxen and the blood of the paschal lamb, the Jews were made one with God in what we call the Old Covenant or Old Testament. Through the blood of the new Paschal Lamb, Jesus, we are made one with God in New Covenant or New Testament. In the words of Jesus at the Last Supper, we not only hear again those words proclaimed many years ago, but we are there in person at the Last Supper as they are said for the very first time.

Reflect now again with gratitude and awe at the meaning of these words as found below.

Masses for Reconciliation I: Though we once were lost and could not approach you, you loved us with the greatest love: for your Son, who alone is just, handed himself over to death, and did not disdain to be nailed for our sake to the wood of the Cross. But before his arms were outstretched between heaven and earth, to become the lasting sign of your covenant, he desired to celebrate the Passover with his disciples. As he ate with them, he took bread and, giving you thanks, he said the blessing, broke the bread and gave it to them, saying: ***Take this, all of you, and eat of it: for this is my Body which will be given up for you.*** In a similar way, when supper was ended, knowing that he was about to reconcile all things in himself through his Blood to be shed on the Cross, he took the chalice, filled with the fruit of the vine, and once more giving you thanks, handed the chalice to his disciples, saying: ***Take this, all of you, and drink from it: for this is the Chalice of my Blood, the Blood of the new and eternal covenant; which will be poured out for you and for many for the forgiveness of sins. Do this in memory of me.***

Eucharistic Prayer IV: For when the hour had come for him to be glorified by you, Father most holy, having loved his own who were in the world, he loved them to the end: and while they were at supper, he took bread, blessed and broke it, 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.*** In a similar way, taking the chalice filled with the fruit of the vine, he gave thanks, and gave the chalice to his disciples, saying: ***Take this, all of you, and drink from it: for this is the Chalice of my Blood, the Blood of the new and eternal covenant; which will be poured out for you and for many for the forgiveness of sins. Do this in memory of me.***

**A PERSONAL REFLECTION ON THE EUCHARISTIC
PRAYERS OF THE MASS: PART EIGHT 8/9**

By Father Jim Benz

Okay, at this point of the Mass, we have just heard the words of the Last Supper, have heard the bells rung, and have just proclaimed the Memorial Acclamation. Jesus is really present on the altar, but the question we must ask is "why," "to what purpose?" What follows is one of the most important yet one of the most overlooked parts of the Eucharistic Prayer, "the Offering." Calling to mind the events of Jesus' Passion, Death, Resurrection, and Ascension, we then "offer" this Jesus now really present on our altar to the Father. His purpose of being really present on the altar is so that he may be our perfect gift to the Father. Yet, in this giving of Jesus to the Father, we "tag along" and offer ourselves to the Father as well.

Back in the 1950's, what we now call the "Preparation of the Gifts" used to be called "the Offertory." Sadly, even now, one at times hears the song during the "Preparation of the Gifts" called the "Offertory Song." **Horrors!!** The reason for that name change years ago was so that we would remember that this part of the Eucharistic Prayer is the **REAL** Offertory. The former "Offertory" was only a "setting of the table" for the **REAL** Offertory. This is the part of the Eucharistic Prayer when the priest offers Jesus as the spotless Lamb of the Covenant to his Father, and, at this time, we, in all our weakness and imperfection and sinfulness, unite ourselves with Jesus.

Masses for Reconciliation I: Therefore, as we celebrate the memorial of your Son Jesus Christ, who is our Passover and our surest peace, we celebrate his Death and Resurrection from the dead, and looking forward to his blessed Coming, we offer you, who are our faithful and merciful God, this sacrificial Victim who reconciles to you the human race.

Masses for Reconciliation II: Celebrating, therefore, the memorial of the Death and Resurrection of your Son, who left us this pledge of his love, we offer you what you have bestowed on us, the Sacrifice of perfect reconciliation.

Eucharistic Prayer for Children I: We do now what Jesus told us to do. We remember his death and resurrection and we offer you, Father, the bread that gives us life, and the cup that saves us. Jesus brings us to you; welcome us as you welcome him.

Eucharistic Prayer for Children II: And so, loving Father, we remember that Jesus died and rose again to save the world. He put himself into our hands to be the sacrifice we offer you.

Eucharistic Prayer for Children III: Father in heaven, accept us together with your beloved Son. He willingly died for us, but you raised him to life again.

Eucharistic Prayer for Various Needs and Occasions I-IV: Therefore, holy Father, as we celebrate the memorial of Christ your Son, our Savior, whom you led through his Passion and Death on the Cross to the glory of the Resurrection, and whom you have seated at your right hand, we proclaim the work of your love until he comes again and we offer you the Bread of life and the Chalice of blessing.

Eucharistic Prayer I: Therefore, O Lord, as we celebrate the memorial of the blessed Passion, the Resurrection from the dead, and the glorious Ascension into heaven of Christ, your Son, our Lord, we, your servants and your holy people, offer to your glorious majesty, from the gifts that you have given us, this pure victim, this holy victim, this spotless victim, the holy Bread of eternal life and the Chalice of everlasting salvation.

Eucharistic Prayer II: Therefore, as we celebrate the memorial of his Death and Resurrection, we offer you, Lord, the Bread of life and the Chalice of salvation, giving thanks that you have held us worthy to be in your presence and minister to you.

Eucharistic Prayer III: Therefore, O Lord, we celebrate the memorial of the saving Passion of your Son, his wondrous Resurrection and Ascension into heaven, and as we look forward to his second coming, we offer you in thanksgiving this holy and living sacrifice.

Eucharistic Prayer IV: Therefore, O Lord, as we now celebrate the memorial of our redemption, we remember Christ's death and his descent to the realm of the dead; we proclaim his Resurrection and his Ascension to your right hand; and as we await his coming in glory, we offer you his Body and Blood, the sacrifice acceptable to you which brings salvation to the whole world.

**A PERSONAL REFLECTION ON THE EUCHARISTIC
PRAYERS OF THE MASS: PART NINE 8/16**

By Father Jim Benz

Doug Vaughn is one of the sports announcers on KMOV-TV Channel 4. One of the things he will always say whenever he shows video of an athlete or coach throwing a tantrum is, "Ooooooo, he was hot!" The same could be said of Pope St. Clement, the pope who succeeded our own patron St. Cletus, when he wrote the following words to the people of Corinth in about 80 A.D., "**Why are there strife and passion, schisms and even war among you? Do we not possess the same Spirit of grace which was given to us and the same calling in Christ? Why do we tear apart and divide the body of Christ? Why do we revolt against our own body? Why do we reach such a degree of insanity that we forget that we are members of one another?**"

From a more positive perspective, St. Cyprian, a bishop and martyr who died in 258, once wrote: "**The greatest offering we can make to God is our peace, harmony among fellow Christians, a people united with the unity of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit.**"

We often speak of "God's will," for instance, "it was God's will that it rained today," or "it was God's will that so-and-so died in that automobile accident last week," or "it was God's will that I lost my job." Ugh! Poor God, he gets blamed for everything. Can we say that those happenings and ones similar to them are "God's will" or do they happen simply because our world is "unfinished and incomplete"? I, for one, don't think we can lay the responsibility for all those things at God's feet by calling them "God's will."

What we can, with absolute assurance, call "God's will," are these next several sections of the Eucharistic Prayer. These "Intercessions" as the Church calls them tell us what is God's will for us. The first of these is God's will for our unity with each other. In chapter 17 of St. John's Gospel, Jesus prays, "Father, may they be one as I am in you and you are in me so that the world will believe that you sent me." The unity of the Church is certainly "God's will." Yet, how sad it is that we so easily sacrifice the unity for which Jesus prayed and for which he gave his life on the altar of "self will." It's so easy to mistakenly think that our celebrations of the Eucharist are simply us as individuals coming together to pray for our own intentions and to personally receive Jesus in Communion, but our celebrations of the Eucharist are just the opposite: they are our Church's "family meal." We don't sit down at family meals only to focus on ourselves; we sit down at family meals to renew our unity with each other. So too the Eucharist.

As Pope St. Clement points out above, the unity of the Church is fragile indeed, but it is only through the unity of the Church that, as Jesus says, the world will come to believe that "you sent me." Please reflect most sincerely on the words of these parts of the following Eucharistic Prayer, and hear "God's will" for unity among his people. By focusing more and more on this central theme of unity as we pray the Eucharistic Prayer, we will come closer to living the words of St. Cyprian that "**The greatest offering we can make to God is our peace, harmony among fellow Christians, a people united with the unity of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit.**" Please reflect on how each of these prayers illustrates the words of Sts. Clement and Cyprian.

Masses for Reconciliation I: Look kindly, most compassionate Father, on those you unite to yourself by the Sacrifice of your Son, and grant that, by the power of the Holy Spirit, as they partake of this one Bread and one Chalice, they may be gathered into one Body in Christ, who heals every division.

Masses for Reconciliation II: Holy Father, we humbly beseech you to accept us also, together with your Son, and in this saving banquet graciously to endow us with his very Spirit, who takes away everything that estranges us from one another.

Eucharistic Prayer for Children II: (earlier in the first part of the EP) He came to show us how we can love you, Father, by loving one another. He came to take away sin, which keeps us from being friends, and hate, which makes us all unhappy

Eucharistic Prayer for Children III: One day he will come in glory and in his kingdom there will be no more suffering, no more tears, no more sadness.

Eucharistic Prayer II: Humbly we pray that, partaking of the Body and Blood of Christ, we may be gathered into one by the Holy Spirit.

Eucharistic Prayer III: Look, we pray, upon the oblation of your Church, and, recognizing the sacrificial Victim by whose death you willed to reconcile us to yourself, grant that we, who are nourished by the Body and Blood of your Son and filled with his Holy Spirit, may become one body, one spirit in Christ.

Eucharistic Prayer IV: Look, O Lord, upon the Sacrifice which you yourself have provided for your Church, and grant in your loving kindness to all who partake of this one Bread and one Chalice that, gathered into one body by the Holy Spirit, they may truly become a living sacrifice in Christ to the praise of your glory.

**A PERSONAL REFLECTION ON THE EUCHARISTIC
PRAYERS OF THE MASS: PART TEN 8/23**

By Father Jim Benz

Last week in this reflection I wrote about God's will. In that reflection I stated, *We often speak of "God's will," for instance, "it was God's will that it rained today," or "it was God's will that so-and-so died in that automobile accident last week," or "it was God's will that I lost my job." Ugh! Poor God, he gets blamed for everything. Can we say that those happenings and ones similar to them are "God's will" or do they happen simply because our world is "unfinished and incomplete"? I, for one, don't think we can lay the responsibility for all those things at God's feet by calling them "God's will." What we can, with absolute assurance, call "God's will," are these next several sections of the Eucharistic Prayer. These "Intercessions" as the Church calls them tell us what is God's will for us. The first of these is God's will for our unity with each other.*

One particular focus of God's will is our unity with those who lead us, particularly our unity with the Pope and the bishop of the local diocese. St. Ignatius of Antioch, a bishop and martyr who died in Rome somewhere between the years of 98 and 117 AD, wrote the following, *Follow the ways of God, and have respect for one another; let no one judge his neighbor as the world does, but love one another always in Jesus Christ. Let there be nothing among you that could divide you, but live in accord with the bishop and those who are over you as a sign and a pattern of eternal life. You should undertake nothing without the bishop and presbyters. Do not attempt to persuade yourselves that what you do on your own account is right and proper, but when you meet together there must be one petition, one prayer, one mind, one hope in love and in holy joy, for Jesus Christ is one and perfect before all else. You must all be quick to come together, as to one temple of God, one altar, to the one Jesus Christ, who came forth from the one Father, while still remaining one with him, and returned to him.*

"Let no one judge his neighbor as the world does, but love one another always in Jesus Christ," he writes. Yet how easily we "judge (our) neighbor as the world does" with regard to those who lead us, particularly the Pope and our own Archbishop Carlson. "The world" tells us that anyone who says something we don't like is "the enemy" who is to be opposed and beaten down. The worst example of how "the world" does this is our own American political system. Look at how the Democrats and Republicans treat each other. Look at what we hear on talk-radio as the "conservatives" talk about the "liberals" and vice versa. Look at tenor of what we read in the editorial sections of newspapers. Unfortunately we Catholics often judge and speak about our leaders in that same way. For many, the respect and love that St. Ignatius urged is largely ignored.

As you reflect on the words below, hear St. Ignatius' and Jesus' call for us to love one another, especially our leaders:

Various Needs and Occasions I: Lord, renew your Church (which is in N.) by the light of the Gospel. Strengthen the bond of unity between the faithful and the pastors of your people, together with N. our Pope, N. our Bishop, and the whole Order of Bishops, that in a world torn by strife your people may shine forth as a prophetic sign of unity and concord.

Various Needs and Occasions II: And so, having called us to your table, Lord, confirm us in unity, so that, together with N. our Pope and N. our Bishop, with all Bishops, Priests and Deacons, and your entire people, as we walk your ways with faith and hope, we may strive to bring joy and trust into the world.

Various Needs and Occasions III: By our partaking of this mystery, almighty Father, give us life through your Spirit, grant that we may be conformed to the image of your Son, and confirm us in the bond of communion, together with N. our Pope and N. our Bishop, with all other Bishops, with Priests and Deacons, and with your entire people.

Various Needs and Occasions IV: Bring your Church, O Lord, to perfect faith and charity, together with N. our Pope and N. our Bishop, with all Bishops, Priests and Deacons, and the entire people you have made your own.

Eucharistic Prayer II: Remember, Lord, your Church, spread throughout the world, and bring her to the fullness of charity, together with N. our Pope and N. our Bishop and all the clergy.

Masses for Reconciliation II: May he make your Church a sign of unity and an instrument of your peace among all people and may he keep us in communion with N. our Pope and N. our Bishop and all the Bishops and your entire people.

A PERSONAL REFLECTION ON THE EUCHARISTIC PRAYERS OF THE MASS: PART ELEVEN 8/30

By Father Jim Benz

Aren't family reunions wonderful? While maybe our particular family might not gather together too often, we have a chance to catch up with each other at weddings, graduations, funerals, anniversaries, and the like. At times like these, we hear about Uncle Claude's recent death, Cousin Jerry's new job, Aunt Margie's cancer, Nephew Jake's recent marriage, Cousin Jane's new baby. Such gatherings help us to remember and to celebrate our bond with each other that goes beyond time.

In the reflections I offered the past two weekends, I focused on God's will. Two weeks ago, I focused on God's will for our unity as one Church. Last weekend, I focused on God's will for our unity with those who lead us, in particular, with the Pope and his brother bishops, especially our own Archbishop. This week we focus on God's will for our unity with the Communion of Saints, that is, the Church Triumphant (those in heaven), Church Militant (us striving to get to Heaven) and Church Suffering (souls in purgatory). In a sense, our celebration of the Eucharist is a family reunion, that is, it reminds us of our unity with the rest of the Body of Christ across time and eternity. However, it is not just an "as if" unity; it is a **real** and **actual** and **present** unity.

If you ever get a chance to go to Las Vegas, I suggest that you visit a Catholic Church called the Shrine of the Most Holy Redeemer. It's at 55 East Reno, a side street just a block or two down from the Luxor. It is one of the most interestingly decorated churches I have ever seen, especially the large shrines that border its walls. What is its most fascinating feature, however, is its weekday Mass chapel. Its walls are filled with life-sized frescos of various contemporary saints and near-saints. St. Maximillian Kolbe is there dressed in his Nazi concentration camp fatigues. There too are the North American Martyrs. Present also are Archbishop Oscar Romero and the four women killed by the death squad in El Salvador. They are all focused on the altar. They all are a striking reminder that each celebration of the Eucharist is a celebration of our union with the Communion of Saints. At each celebration of the Mass, they are present with us, standing at our sides, not just the saints in heaven, not just those being purged of sinful habits, but also all our brothers and sisters on Earth in the union we call the Body of Christ.

Various Needs and Occasions III: Grant that all the faithful of the Church, looking into the signs of the times by the light of faith, may constantly devote themselves to the service of the Gospel. Keep us attentive to the needs of all that, sharing their grief and pain, their joy and hope, we may faithfully bring them the good news of salvation and go forward with them along the way of your Kingdom.

Various Needs and Occasions IV: Open our eyes to the needs of our brothers and sisters; inspire in us words and actions to comfort those who labor and are burdened. Make us serve them truly, after the example of Christ and at his command. And may your Church stand as a living witness to truth and freedom, to peace and justice, that all people may be raised up to a new hope.

Along with Various Needs and Occasions I & II, they continue: Remember our brothers and sisters (N. and N.), who have fallen asleep in the peace of your Christ, and all the dead, whose faith you alone have known. Admit them to rejoice in the light of your face, and in the resurrection give them the fullness of life. Grant also to us, when our earthly pilgrimage is done, that we may come to an eternal dwelling place and live with you for ever; there, in communion with the Blessed Virgin Mary, Mother of God, with the Apostles and Martyrs, (with Saint N.: *the Saint of the day or Patron*) and with all the Saints, we shall praise and exalt you through Jesus Christ, your Son.

Eucharistic Prayer III: To our departed brothers and sisters and to all who were pleasing to you at their passing from this life, give kind admittance to your kingdom.

Eucharistic Prayer IV: Remember also those who have died in the peace of your Christ and all the dead, whose faith you alone have known. To all of us, your children, grant, O merciful Father, that we may enter into a heavenly inheritance with the blessed Virgin Mary, Mother of God, and with your Apostles and Saints in your kingdom.

Masses for Reconciliation I: Help us to work together for the coming of your Kingdom, until the hour when we stand before you, Saints among the Saints in the halls of heaven, with the Blessed Virgin Mary, Mother of God, the blessed Apostles and all the Saints, and with our deceased brothers and sisters, whom we humbly commend to your mercy.

Masses for Reconciliation II: Just as you have gathered us now at the table of your Son, so also bring us together, with the glorious Virgin Mary, Mother of God, with your blessed Apostles and all the Saints, with our brothers and sisters and those of every race and tongue who have died in your friendship. Bring us to share with them the unending banquet of unity in a new heaven and a new earth, where the fullness of your peace will shine forth in Christ Jesus our Lord.

Children III: Help all who follow Jesus to work for peace and to bring happiness to others. Bring us all at last together with Mary, the Mother of God, and all the saints, to live with you and to be one with Christ in heaven.

**A PERSONAL REFLECTION ON THE EUCHARISTIC
PRAYERS OF THE MASS: PART TWELVE (the conclusion) 9/6**

By Father Jim Benz

A "doxology," coming from the Greek "doxa" meaning "glory" and "logos" meaning "word," is a short hymn of praise to God usually invoking the Trinity added to the end of a prayer or a hymn. The last words that conclude all the Eucharistic Prayers we use at Mass are such a doxology; in fact, it is called "The Doxology" which is followed by "The Great Amen." (Again, the word "amen" means "to express solemn ratification or hearty approval" or a strong **YES, I BELIEVE IT WITH ALL MY HEART!**) In the Doxology that concludes the Eucharistic Prayer, we vibrantly profess our faith in all the points proclaimed in the Eucharistic Prayer.

For a moment, let's look back at all we are saying "YES" to God for: the wonder of God's love for us, our dependence on the Holy Spirit, Jesus' real presence on our altar, Jesus as our gift to the Father, God's will that we be truly one people, God's will that we love and support our leaders, and God's will that we form with the Saints the one Body of Christ. At this time, the priest is directed to "lift up," much higher than at the Preparation of the Gifts and even higher than at the Consecration, the now Body and Blood of Christ to sing the words of this short hymn of praise, and we respond with our "seal of approval," that is, our **AMEN!**

Before commenting further, I would like to change the format of what I have been doing in my previous reflections. Rather than saving the various related sections of the Eucharistic Prayers for the bottom of this page, I would like to present them now and the Doxology itself. Once more, please reflect on them with all your heart:

Children I: We are filled with wonder and praise when we see what you do for us through Jesus your Son, and so we sing:

Children II: There all the friends of Jesus the Lord will sing a song of joy.

Masses for Reconciliation I: Then, freed at last from the wound of corruption and made fully into a new creation, we shall sing to you with gladness the thanksgiving of Christ, who lives for all eternity.

Eucharistic Prayer III: There we hope to enjoy for ever the fullness of your glory through Christ our Lord through whom you bestow on the world all that is good.

Eucharistic Prayer IV: There, with the whole of creation, freed from the corruption of sin and death, may we glorify you through Christ our Lord, through whom you bestow on the world all that is good.

And the Doxology and Great Amen: Through him, with him, and in him, in the unity of the Holy Spirit, all glory and honor is yours, almighty Father, for ever and ever. Amen!

Scripture and Church Tradition both state that the Church is the Bride and Jesus is the Bridegroom. The Bishops of the Second Vatican Council wrote that the Liturgy, particularly the celebration of the Eucharist, is the "summit and source" of the Christian life. Is it too much of a stretch, then, to say that the Mass is to Christ and the Church as what sexual intercourse is to a husband and wife? I think not; in fact, the link is very clear.

Sexual intercourse expresses the unity that couple shares. It expresses joy at their presence with one another. It expresses their commitment to each other. Every time a couple experiences the "marital embrace," Pope John Paul II said, that embrace is to be a rededication by the couple to their wedding vows and directly links them to their wedding day. How sad it is, then, for a couple when they experience the "marital embrace" but only do so to "go through the motions" or to simply use each other for self-gratification or when the self-giving love that marriage is all about is absent.

The same can be said of our celebrations of the Eucharist. Each celebration of the Eucharist is the "wedding feast of the Lamb," that is, Jesus and the Church. Each celebration of the Eucharist is to express our unity with our Bridegroom, Jesus. Each celebration of the Eucharist is to express our joy at the presence of our Bridegroom with us. Each celebration of the Eucharist is to express our commitment to our Bridegroom. Each celebration of the Eucharist is to be a rededication to our wedding vows to Christ (our Baptismal Promises) and directly links us to our wedding day (the Passion, Death, and Resurrection of Jesus). How sad it is when we simply "go through the motions" or use God for our self-gratification or when the self-giving love that Eucharist is all about is absent.

The key to living a happy marriage is for the couple to never let their love grow stale and cold but to always make sure that their love is fresh and alive! The same is true for our commitment to our Bridegroom, Jesus. May we, priests and people, always pray the Eucharistic Prayer at each Mass with deep love and abiding gratitude so that the way we live our lives may always be an **AMEN** to God, echoing the **AMEN** that concludes this prayer!