

The Preface – Lift up Your Hearts (proper thanksgiving to God as well)

Now that we have officially begun the second half of the Mass in our weekly reflections, which is called the Liturgy of the Eucharist, we launch into a very ancient prayer called ***The Preface***. The Catholic priest begins this prayer by three short call and response prayers between himself [standing the person of Jesus] and all the people. He begins by saying, “*The Lord be with you,*” and the people respond, “*And with your spirit.*” This is exactly the same as the beginning of Mass, and we can remember how Biblical encouragement was given to people who were about to be sent on a special mission from God! We are now sent into the holy of holies of God’s presence in the Liturgy of the Eucharist, so this is our special mission at every Mass we attend.

Secondly, the priest declares, “*Lift up your hearts,*” and everyone responds together, “*We lift them up to the Lord.*” My favorite part about this prayer is that we all know that we need this encouragement since we are so easily distracted and primarily focus on the visible and external images of what is happening during Mass, rather than the invisible reality that exists behind the prayers and symbols that we hear, smell, touch, or see during every Mass. For example, in Colossians 3:1-2, St. Paul encourages the Christians in that town to “...Set your minds on things that are above, not on things that are on earth.” Not only that, but many of the early Church Fathers, saw great richness and depth in these words during the Mass such as St. Cyprian in 250 AD or St. Cyril of Jerusalem. Listen to the words of St. Cyril who declares,

“Lift up your hearts: For in this sublime moment the heart should be lifted up to God, and not be allowed to descend to the earth and to earthly concerns. With all possible emphasis the sacrificing priest exhorts us in this hour to lay aside all the cares of this life, all domestic worries, and direct our hearts to God in heaven who hath so loved men...”

Finally and thirdly, the priest says, “*Let us give thanks to the Lord our God,*” and everyone responds, “*It is right and just.*” One of the problems of our broken human condition is that we fail to give thanks to God in the proper way, with the proper emphasis, and according to the proper quantity of thanksgiving that He truly deserves (Ps. 136:1-3; Col. 2:7; Col. 3:16-17; 1 Thes. 5:18; Phil. 4:6; 1 Cor. 14:16-19; and Eph. 5:19-20, and the list goes on and on!). The Preface prayer then begins with a beautiful reflection where the words correspond to the specific celebration of the season or day of the Church calendar. May we be thankful for this ancient prayer of the early Church during the Mass, and may we enter into the Preface prayer by giving God proper thanksgiving and lifting up our hearts to the invisible realities that exist at every Mass we attend.