

THE EPICLESIS – (Part 1 of The Eucharistic Prayer) – Calling Down the Holy Spirit!

As the Eucharistic Prayer begins (once again we said last week that there are currently 10 variations for Eucharistic Prayer options for Roman Catholics...I'm currently often using Eucharistic Prayer III each Sunday here at OLV in Shippensburg on pg. 26 of our Hymnal if you'd like to follow along each week), the first main part of the Eucharistic prayer is called the *epiclesis*. This Greek word means an invocation or a calling upon or a calling down, and this refers to specific prayers that the priest prays to call down the Holy Spirit in preparation for this most important moment of the Catholic Mass. The Institution Narrative and Consecration prayers that immediately follow these *epiclesis* prayers are traditionally THE MOMENT that the bread and the wine become the very body, blood, soul, and divinity of Jesus Christ. However, these *epiclesis* prayers are still considered essential and in a sense are a part of the consecration and transubstantiation that occurs during every Catholic Mass around the world. Look at the words that are used in Eucharistic Prayer III when that Eucharistic Prayer is used during Mass:

“Father, you are holy indeed, and all creation rightly gives you praise... And so, Father, we bring you these gifts. **We ask you to make them holy by the power of your Spirit,** that they may become the body and blood of your Son, our Lord Jesus Christ...”
{{...emphasis added...}}

One of my favorite ways to picture this using our imagination is to picture the Holy Spirit as fire coming down upon the altar during these prayers. Many people have encouraged Christians to think of God's presence as having the power of fire in a sense (God is a pure spirit, so we need to use our imaginations to lift our minds to this reality that doesn't take up any space or have any physical character traits). This is all throughout Scripture, but it also helps us to understand the power and activity of God's presence, whether it is in our souls or present in the Bible or present in the Eucharist! By imagining the Holy Spirit coming down as fire upon the altar during these prayers we are both preparing our souls for the miracle of bread and wine to become the body of blood of Jesus in our presence, but also, we are preparing to make a gift of ourselves when we unite ourselves to Christ in communion. May we ask God to help us understand how the Holy Spirit comes down at each and every Mass, and how these ancient prayers help us to prepare our minds and souls to encounter the Divine love of Christ who becomes present in the Eucharist!