

THE MASS

PART TWO THE EUCHARISTIC PRAYER

Pastoral Letter 2019-2020

**To all the Catholics of the
Apostolic Vicariate of Northern Arabia
Bishop Camillo Ballin, mccj**

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Introduction

Dear Fathers, dear brothers and sisters,

This year also I propose to you these notes on the Eucharist. Last year we reflected on the first part, from the beginning to the prayer of the faithful. This year we look at the central part, from the Offertory to the Our Father. Next year we shall meditate on the final part, in sha' Allah.

I stress very much on the Eucharist because it is *“the source and the summit of the Christian life”* (Vatican II, The Church, 11).

The second Vatican Council also teaches that: *“The catechesis of the Eucharistic mystery should aim to help the faithful to realize that the celebration of the Eucharist is the true centre of the whole Christian life both for the universal Church and for the local congregation of that Church”* (Sacred Liturgy).

We can find a very good explanation of the Eucharist in the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* (CCC). I invite every one of you, and every Movement, Group and Community, to read one point of the explanation given by the CCC every month.

Let us say:

October: The Eucharist – Source and Summit of Ecclesial Life

(CCC, numbers 1324-1327).

November: What is this Sacrament called?

(CCC 1328-1332).

December: The Eucharist in the Economy of Salvation.
Part I (CCC 1333-1336).

January: The Eucharist in the Economy of Salvation.
Part II (CCC 1337-1344).

February: The Liturgical celebration of the Eucharist
(CCC 1345-1355).

March: The Sacramental Sacrifice: Thanksgiving,
Memorial, Presence.
Part I (CCC1356-1372).

April: The Sacramental Sacrifice: Thanksgiving,
Memorial, Presence.
Part II (CCC 1373-1381).

May: The Pascal Banquet
(CCC 1382-1401).

June: The Eucharist – “Pledge of the Glory to Come”
(CCC 1402-1405).

Let us be faithful to this program and we shall discover
many riches of the Eucharist.

God loves us all.

Your Bishop

+ Camillo Ballin, mcccj

The Offertory

Now begins the second half of the Mass: The Liturgy of the Eucharist. It is known also as the “Mass of the Faithful” because in ancient times only the baptized were allowed to stay at Mass for this portion. Nor could any Christian stay who had arrived with unforgiven mortal sin.

Now begins the sacrificial portion of the Mass: the offering, the remembrance that Jesus asked of his apostles at the Last Supper. The sacrifice starts with an offering, and that’s why this moment is called the offertory.

We begin by bringing our gifts to the altar. That’s a very general way of describing what happens, but it’s accurate. We bring our gifts - material and spiritual gifts. We bring what we have and what we are, and we acknowledge that all comes from God and it all belongs to God.

Since the earliest days of the Church, Christians have used this time to “take up a collection” or “pass the basket”. Today we collect money that is used for the upkeep of the Church and the funding of charitable activities. In the first centuries, Christians would bring whatever they had and place it by the altar, leaving it at the disposal of the priest or the local bishop. They give for the God’s sake and not to earn fame. Saint Paul records this abundantly as he travels (see Romans 15:26 and 1 Corinthians 16:1-2). Why did Christians give so generously? Paul explained: “Through the evidence of

this service, you are glorifying God for your obedient confession of the Gospel of Christ and the generosity of your contribution to them and to all others”

(2 Corinthians 9:13).

Sometimes, selected members of the congregation will bring the collection to the altar, along with the bread and wine to be offered in the Eucharist.

Over time, it became necessary to limit the gifts that should be brought to the altar during the offertory. The Church wanted people to distinguish the essential elements - which are those that Jesus offered, the bread and the wine - from all other gifts we wish to give to Christ and to charity.

The preparation of the Gifts

While the congregation takes up the collection, the priest (or if present, the deacon) prepares the altar. He places the cloths, the corporal and the purificator. He positions the missal, paten, and chalice.

The priest lifts up the paten that holds the bread, and he praises God: “Blessed are you, Lord God of all creation, for through your goodness we have received the bread we offer you: fruit of the earth and work of human hands, it will become for us the bread of life”. The congregation responds: “Blessed be God forever”.

He then pours wine and a little bit of water into the chalice as he prays: “By the mystery of this water and wine may we come to share in the divinity of Christ who humbled himself to share in our humanity”.

The priest then elevates the chalice and pronounces a similar blessing: “Blessed are you Lord God of all creation, for through your goodness we have received the wine we offer you: fruit of the vine and work of human hands, it will become our spiritual drink”.

The priest then prays quietly over the chalice: “With humble spirit and contrite heart may we be accepted by you, O Lord, and may our sacrifice in your sight this day be pleasing to you, Lord God”.

The altar servers will be standing ready at the side of the altar, with a pitcher of water, a small bowl or a basin (the Lavabo), and a towel. The priest washes his hands as he quietly prays: “Wash me, O Lord, from my iniquity and cleanse me from my sin”.

Finally, turning to face the congregation, he extends and then joins his hands, saying: “Pray, brethren (or brothers and sisters), that my sacrifice and yours may be acceptable to God, the almighty Father”.

The people stand up and reply: “May the Lord accept the sacrifice at your hands for the praise and glory of his name, for our good and the good of all his holy Church”.

Why does the priest mix a little bit of water with the wine? There is a practical, historical reason, and several symbolic interpretations. The historical fact is that that was the custom for most Mediterranean people living in the time of Jesus Christ. They stored wine in a concentrated form, and then diluted it at mealtime. Most of the ancient descriptions of the Passover meal describe the mixing of water with wine.

As a symbol, first of all, it provided a historical connection with the Passover “Seder” meal, which the Christian were eager to preserve. But there is still more. In the second century, Saint Irenaeus of Lyon, in France, saw the mixture as the symbol of the union of the human and divine natures in Jesus Christ: like the water and wine, they were so close as to be inseparable. Some decades later, Saint Cyprian, a North African, saw the mixture as a symbol of the communion of Christ with the Church - again so close as to be indistinguishable from one another. And, of course, down the centuries, many saints have seen the mixture of wine and water as a vivid image of the blood and water that poured forth from the pierced side of Christ on the cross (see John 19:34).

As the priests of the Old Testament, and like God’s people who long ago observed the Passover, the priest ritually washes his hands - a baptismal image, signifying his wish to be cleansed of his sins and worthily offer the sacrifice. Remember the instructions in the First Letter to Timothy: “It is my wish, then, that in every place the men should pray, lifting up holy hands” (1 Timothy 2:8). “Holy hands” were “clean hands”; the terms were synonymous among Greek-speaking Jews. And clean hands are meant to be an outward sign of an inner purity. In Baptism, we have been “washed ... in the blood of the Lamb” (Revelation 7:14).

As the priest offers the gifts, so we offer ourselves and all that we have - our work, prayers and Christian witness, our family life, our daily work and even our

hardships. In the words of the Second Vatican Council, “these sacrifices are most lovingly offered to the Father” with the bread and wine.

The Preface and “Holy, Holy, Holy”

Priest: *The Lord be with you*

Congregation: *And with your spirit*

Priest: *Lift up your hearts*

Congregation: *We lift them up to the Lord*

Priest: *Let us give thanks to the Lord our God*

Congregation: *It is right and just*

When we exchange these words, as we do at every Mass, we are adding our voices to those of countless Christians since the first generations. Saint Hippolytus includes this dialogue in his account of the Roman Mass in the early 200s A.D. Saint Cyprian, just a few years later, explains these words as he describes the Mass in North Africa: “The priest, by means of the preface before his prayer, prepares the minds of the people by saying ‘Lift up your hearts’. He does this so that when the people respond ‘We lift them up to the Lord’ he may be reminded that he himself ought to think of nothing but the Lord”.

We call this part of the Mass the “Preface” because it is the very threshold of the most important prayer - the Eucharistic Prayer - and so it takes us to the very gate of heaven. Through the Eucharistic Prayer, Jesus becomes

really present among us, as he promised; and when Jesus abides, there is heaven.

Since the root meaning of the word “Eucharist” is “Thanks-giving” it is fitting that we begin our great Eucharistic Prayer on a note of gratitude. Thankfulness is indeed the dominant theme in the prayers used for the preface: “Father, all-powerful and ever-living God, we do always and everywhere to give you thanks, through Jesus Christ our Lord”.

What follows then will vary from Mass to Mass. There are prefaces for the various liturgical seasons and special prefaces for the great feasts of the year. There are prefaces for Masses commemorating the Blessed Virgin Mary, and for different categories of saints (apostles, martyrs, and so on). We give thanks for the lives and witness of the saints.

The prefaces conclude by reminding us that we are praying now “with all the saints and angels”, and so we sing or say:

Holy, Holy, Holy Lord God of hosts.

Heaven and earth are full of your glory.

Hosanna in the highest.

Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord.

Hosanna in the highest.

Saint John Chrysostom said of the Mass in his day: “The angels are present here... The whole air about us is filled with angels”.

Some things, like God’s love, never change.

The Eucharistic Prayer

We come now to the moment the Church, in its General Instruction of the Roman Missal, calls “the center and summit of the entire celebration”. We arrived at the Eucharistic Prayer.

Jesus accomplished the only sacrifice, the one great sacrifice, when, as priest and victim, he offered himself on the altar of the cross. His sacrifice need not and cannot be repeated. But it can be re-presented so that we are able, sacramentally and spiritually, to enter it and draw spiritual nourishment from it.

In our Vicariate the congregation recognizes the sacred character of this prayer by kneeling through its entirety. As soon as we finish singing “Holy, Holy, Holy”, the faithful fall to their knees in expectation of the coming of Jesus Christ.

In the Roman Missal there are four primary Eucharistic Prayers the priest may choose from:

Eucharistic Prayer I (also known as the Roman Canon) is based upon the great Latin liturgy of the ancient Church. In its present form, it was published by Pope Saint Pius V

In 1570, but it is substantially the same as the rites described in the writings of the great fathers of the Western Church, Saint Ambrose (fourth century), Saint

Augustine (fifth century), and Saint Gregory the Great (sixth century).

Eucharistic Prayer II is based on a liturgy in the Greek language recorded around A.D. 215 by Saint Hippolytus of Rome. It may have been long established by the time he wrote it down. It fell into disuse for more than a millennium, but was reinstated in the second half of the twentieth century. It is brief and to the point. Eucharistic Prayer II is intended primarily for use on weekdays.

Eucharistic Prayer III follows the pattern of the Roman Canon, but in a more abbreviated form. It was composed during the latter part of the twentieth century.

Eucharistic Prayer IV was modelled after certain liturgies of the Eastern Church. It includes a longer, very poetic retelling of the history of salvation. It begins with an account of God's life in eternity, proceeds through creation and the original sin, and then through the history of the covenants, culminating in the redemption won through the life of Jesus Christ.

In addition to these four, the Church has other Eucharistic Prayers to be used in special circumstances - two for Masses of Reconciliation, three for Masses with children and four for Various Needs.

The various Eucharistic Prayers differ from one another in style and content, but they share a similar solemnity and dignity. Each has its own emphasis, but they all speak the same truth, tell the same story, and accomplish the same end.

They also share certain common elements. Like so many of the prayers of the Mass, the Eucharistic Prayers are Trinitarian. In praying them, the priest, on behalf of the entire Church, addresses God the Father through Christ in the Spirit.

Every Eucharistic Prayer includes:

- + Thanksgiving and acclamation - these take place most prominently in the preface and “Holy, Holy, Holy”
- + A prayer for the sending of the Holy Spirit (also called the epiclesis)
- + The institution narrative. - the story of the Last Supper.
- + Remembrance (also called anamnesis)
- + Offering
- + Intercessions
- + A final doxology.

Prayer for the Sending of the Spirit

In every Eucharistic Prayer, the priest asks God the Father to send the Holy Spirit, the third person of the Blessed Trinity. This prayer is called the epiclesis (from the Greek “to call upon”). In Eucharistic Prayer II, the

priest says: “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 “. As he does this, he draws his hands together over the gifts to evoke the hovering of the Spirit, as at the baptism of Jesus.

This is a very important prayer. For the gifts cannot be transformed by any human means, but only by the power of God. The epiclesis makes eminently clear that the Mass is primarily a work of God, and not simply a pious action or human custom. Without the power of the Holy Spirit, the Mass would not be the Mass.

The Catechism of the Catholic Church (1106) says: “It is by the Spirit that we have new life (Romans 8:15). It is only by the Spirit that we can pray to the Father (Galatians 4:6). It is by the Spirit that we know God’s love in our hearts (Romans 5:5). It is the Spirit who gives us hope (Romans 15:13). Often when the New Testament speaks of the Spirit, it speaks of divine power. There is nothing the Holy Spirit cannot accomplish - including the change of bread and wine into the body and blood of Christ.

The Spirit can even make us holy (Romans 15:16) - though only God is holy by nature (Revelation 15:4).

The Spirit is also the principle of unity in the Church. So the Eucharistic Prayers also include a second epiclesis, a prayer for the Spirit to come upon the people as upon the gifts. The priest prays in Eucharistic Prayer II that, “partaking of the Body and Blood of Christ, we may be gathered into one by the Holy Spirit”. Similarly, in

Eucharistic Prayer IV he asks that we may be “gathered into one body by the Holy Spirit”. In Eucharistic Prayer III, he prays “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. The Spirit transforms us and all of us, into Christ. We receive his body, and we become his body, by the power of the Holy Spirit”.

Jesus came to us to give us the Spirit, and by the Spirit we come to share God’s life. That, moreover, is the Catholic understanding of grace, it is a sharing in divine life. “As fire transforms into itself everything it touches, so the Holy Spirit transforms into the divine life whatever is subjected to his power” (Catechism of the Catholic Church, 1127).

Again, this part of the Mass is our reminder that we live amid marvels, but they are no work of our own. More than a millennium and half ago, Saint John Chrysostom said: “He who stands at the altar does nothing, and the gifts that repose there are not the merits of a man, but the grace of the Holy Spirit is present and, descending on all, accomplishes this mysterious sacrifice. We indeed see a man [the priest], but it is God who acts through him. Nothing human takes place at this holy altar”.

The Narrative of Institution

While the New Testament has several accounts of Jesus’ Passion and death, the narrative always begins with the

account of the Last Supper. The Gospels of Saint Matthew, Saint Mark and Saint Luke tell the story in very similar ways, each explicitly linking the events of our redemption to the institution of the Eucharist. In Saint John's Gospel, we find an account with different emphases, but we also find Jesus' dialogue that prepared for the institution of the Eucharist. At the synagogue in Capernaum, he called himself "bread of life ... that comes down from heaven" (see John 6).

Saint Paul's account is similar to those of Matthew, Mark, and Luke. Paul's was probably the earliest-written of all of them - set down perhaps twenty years after the Last Supper - and he emphasizes that he is simply passing on what is already a well-known tradition. "For I received from the Lord what I also handed on to you, that the Lord Jesus, on the night he was handed over, took bread, and, after he had given thanks, broke it and said, 'This is my body that is for you. Do this in remembrance of me'. In the same way also the cup, after supper, saying: 'This cup is the new covenant in my blood. Do this, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of me'. For as often as you eat this bread and drink the cup, you proclaim the death of the Lord until he comes" (1 Corinthians 11:23-26").

The night before he was to undergo his Passion, Jesus established a new memorial - a new way to recall and to remember what he was about to endure. That memorial is the Mass, and specifically the Eucharistic Prayer. That is why every Eucharistic Prayer in the Roman Missal

includes the institution narrative: the story of the Last Supper, drawn from the Gospel accounts.

The original context of the new memorial was the Passover, which is itself an ancient memorial. The “Seder” of the Jews is the ritual meal established at God’s command to help the chosen people remember the events of their deliverance from Egypt and the loving kindness of God, their deliverer.

In that pretechnological age there were no cameras, no cell phones, no tapes or disks or I Pods to hold the audio or visual data. How did the people store their important memories? How did a nation like Israel preserve its historical identity? They did this chiefly through the calendar: the celebrations and ritual reminders that recurred each year. On festival days, people recalled what had happened to them in the past, pondered its significance for them in the present, and considered its implications for the future.

In the Book of Exodus, we read that God instructed Moses to institute a memorial meal - a ritual presentation of the Passover events. The meal was closely connected with the circumstances of the liberation. The lamb that served as a substitute for Israel’s firstborn, the dinner eaten in haste while preparing for flight, these captured in ritual what God was about to effect in history.

The Lord gave a special command to repeat these ceremonies in the future. “This day shall be a memorial feast for you, which all your generations shall celebrate with pilgrimage to the Lord, as a perpetual institution ...

Since it was on this very day that I brought your ranks out of the land of Egypt, you must celebrate this day throughout your generations as a perpetual institution” (Exodus 12:14,17).

This series of events was lovingly preserved, for millennia, in the annual repetition of the Passover meal. As generation after generation shared the paschal lamb and unleavened bread, fathers told their children of the wonders the Lord had worked on behalf of his chosen people. Passover was more than a community festival, more than a chance to review past history. In the Passover meal, God’s people knew they were with their Lord, and they renewed their family bond, their covenant with him.

As the Catechism of the Catholic Church teaches us: “In the sense of the Sacred Scripture the memorial is not merely the recollection of past events but the proclamation of the mighty works wrought by God for men. In the liturgical celebration of these events, they become in a certain way present and real. This is how Israel understands its liberation from Egypt: every time Passover is celebrated, the Exodus events are made present to the memory of believers so that they may conform their lives to them” (CCC, 1363).

In the new Passover, the Paschal Mystery of Jesus, we find a similar interplay of ritual and history. In the Old Testament, first came the offering of the Passover lamb, then the flight from Egypt. In the New Testament, first came the Jesus’ self-offering at the Last Supper - when

he said, 'This is my body' - then the crucifixion and Resurrection.

When he told his disciples to "do this", Jesus established the Last Supper as the ceremonial setting for the remembrance of our salvation. In this way, the new covenant could be renewed with every succeeding generation. We need not to remain powerless in our enslavement to sin. We need not remain powerless against the finality of death.

The original Passover meal was instituted to remind Israelites of their identity as God's people. The Eucharist, too, creates a common identity for the new people of God, but it does much more as well. The Eucharist has the power to make present the event it memorializes - not just as a memory, but as a reality. In the New Testament the memorial takes on new meaning. When the Church celebrates the Mass, she commemorates Christ's Passover and it is made present: the sacrifice Christ offered once for all on the cross remains ever present.

The Church calls us not just to a commemoration of long-ago events, as great as that might be, but also to enter the mystery itself-today. We are not bystanders, but participants.

Remembrance

The remembrance expresses a sense of our longing to be there, to be present, somehow, at the foot of the cross and to receive the redemption won for us by the

blood that flowed from Jesus' hand and feet and side. It's as if remembering him is not enough. We want to be with him.

We have no time machine. We cannot be physically present at Calvary, but there is a real sense - a sacramental and spiritual sense - in which we are there as we share in the Eucharist. Read the letter to the Hebrews, and you will see that Jesus now presides as high priest in heaven, presenting the gift of himself to the Father: his body, blood, soul, and divinity. He holds nothing back from the Father.

Nor does he hold anything back from us. In heaven, God's self-gift is eternal, complete, and perfect. On earth, the very sign of that self-giving is the crucifix that stands by the altar. Jesus' self-giving on the cross was to be everlasting, complete, and perfect. The representation of that gift is the Mass. There, Jesus gives us his body, blood, soul, and divinity in the Eucharist. He shares his life with us. And we join in his great offering to the Father. "Through him let us continually offer God a sacrifice of praise" (Hebrews 13:15).

Jesus knew we would want to be with him, wherever he should go. He himself wanted to be with us forever. So he made his promise: "And behold, I am with you always, until the end of the age" (Matthew 28:20), and he established the means for us to enjoy his presence. It is the Eucharist.

We are not simply bystanders at this memorial. We are partakers in the Passover of Jesus Christ. This new ritual

instituted at the Last Supper gives us the body of Christ. It makes us the body of Christ. Since Christ has given himself as our spiritual food, we “come to share in the divine nature” (2 Peter 1:4).

When the Church celebrates the Eucharist, the memorial of her Lord’s death and Resurrection, this central event of salvation becomes really present and “the work of our redemption is carried out” (Ecclesia de Eucharistia, 11).

Where you there? Yes, you ARE there. You are with him whenever the Church remembers - whenever you go to Mass.

The First Elevation of the Host and Chalice

Jesus said:

“And just as Moses lifted up the serpent in the desert, so must the Son of Man be lifted up, so that everyone who believes in him may have eternal life” (John 3:14-15).

“When you lift up the Son of Man, then you will realize that I AM, and that I do nothing on my own, but I say only what the Father taught me” (John 8:28).

“And when I am lifted up from the earth, I will draw everyone to myself” (John 12:32).

We are his beloved disciples, whom he has drawn to the Mount of the Ascension: “as they were looking on, he was lifted up” (Acts 1:9).

When the priest consecrates the bread, it is no longer bread, though it keeps the appearance of bread. It is the

body of Christ. “The bread that we break, is it not a participation in the body of Christ?” (1 Corinthians 10:16). It is indeed the body of Christ, and the priest raises it up as a perfect offering to the Father.

When the priest consecrates the chalice of wine, it no longer holds wine, though the contents of the chalice keep the appearance of wine. The chalice now contains the blood of Christ. “The cup of blessing that we bless, is it not a participation in the blood of Christ?” (1 Corinthians 10:16). It is indeed a communion in Christ’s blood. The priest elevates the chalice as a perfect offering to the Father.

This part of the Mass is known as the “minor elevation”. At each elevation, first the host and then the chalice, you will see some people bow, others gaze at the elements, and still others whisper prayers under their breath (a favourite is that of the Apostle Thomas: “My Lord and my God” (John 20:28).

To know Jesus is to love him. To gaze upon him is to be overwhelmed by that love. Knowing what we know - about his memorial, about his real presence - how can we help but adore him?

The small bells that are rung by the altar servers during each elevation strike the ears as a fanfare for this heavenly king, who comes to us so humbly.

The Mystery of Faith

The priest calls us to proclaim “The mystery of faith”. The congregations respond with one of several short statements:

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.

Save us, Saviour of the world, for by your Cross and Resurrection you have set us free.

The response is a summary of the Paschal Mystery - Jesus’ Passion, death, Resurrection, and glorification, in its past, present, and future dimensions. We affirm the historical truth: cross, death, and rising. We affirm the present reality: the bread of life and the cup of salvation. We acknowledge its saving power. And we look to its future fulfilment, begun now in the Eucharist, when Christ comes in glory.

The Church identifies this mystery as the centre of the whole Christian experience. Pope Benedict XVI noted that Christ redeemed mankind “principally by the Paschal Mystery of his blessed passion, resurrection from the dead and glorious ascension, whereby ‘dying, he destroyed our death and, rising, he restored our life’ “. The Church celebrates the Paschal Mystery by “reading also ‘in all the ‘Scriptures those things which referred to himself’ (Luke 24:27), celebrating the Eucharist in which ‘the victory and triumph of his death

are again made present', and at the same time giving thanks 'to God for his indescribable gift' (2 Corinthians 9:15) in Christ Jesus, 'to the praise of his glory' (Ephesians 1:12), through the power of the Holy Spirit". In the liturgy the victory and triumph of Christ's death are made present, so that we can say, as does the Second Vatican Council, "The Liturgy is the summit toward which the activity of the Church is directed; at the same time it is the font from which all her power flows".

All the mysteries of faith are revealed to us within a single mystery: The Paschal Mystery. We enter that mystery through the Eucharist. Christ our Passover Lamb is sacrificed TODAY, because his sacrifice was once for all. *That's* the mystery made present, re-presented now.

In the Jubilee Year at the turn of the millennium, Pope John Paul II marvelled at this gift as he offered Mass with his brother bishops in Jerusalem, in the Upper Room where Jesus celebrated the Last Supper. At every Holy Mass, we proclaim the "mystery of faith", which for two millennia has nourished and sustained the Church as she makes her pilgrim way amid the persecutions of the world and the consolation of God, proclaiming the cross and death of the Lord until he comes...

This is the "mystery of faith" which we proclaim in every celebration of the Eucharist. Jesus Christ, the priest of the new and eternal covenant, has redeemed the world by his Blood. Risen from the dead, he has given to

prepare a place for us in his Father's house. In the Spirit who has made us God's beloved children, in the unity of the Body of Christ, we await his return with joyful hope. The season and the surroundings made that Mass special for the Pope. He reminded everyone, however, that the saving truth applies to every Mass, no matter where it is celebrated, no matter when.

Eucharistic Prayers

"Bless these gifts ... which we offer you firstly for your holy catholic Church". So says the priest when he recites the first Eucharistic Prayer. *"And [bless] all those who, holding to the truth, hand on the catholic and apostolic faith".*

"Catholic" is what we have called our Church since the first generation of Christianity. Saint Ignatius of Antioch used the phrase in A.D. 107, and so did many more authors in his century and the next. The word *catholic* means "universal", a term that well describes the scope of our concerns during the Mass, and especially during the Eucharistic Prayer.

The Church is *catholic* because Christ is present in her, wherever she may be. As Saint Ignatius wrote: *"Where there is Christ Jesus, there is the Catholic Church"*. The Catholic Church is also a church for all peoples in all places and at all times. It continues to teach all that Christ taught.

"Catholic" denotes not a sect or a denomination, but a church as big as the world and as vast as time. That's why we offer such a range of petitions along with the Lord's body and blood during the Eucharistic Prayer.

The Eucharist is the prayer of the whole Church. We thank God the Father for his mercy in redeeming the world. We thank him especially for sending the Son into the world to be one of us. That is why, in the course of this long prayer, we sketch out the history of God's saving acts.

We also raise our prayer in intercession for the whole world. There is a universal, catholic quality to the petitions of the Eucharistic Prayer. We seek the fulfillment of the longings, expectations, and needs of the whole Church and the whole universe. Saint Paul described the matter well: "*We know that all creation is groaning in labor pains even until now*" (Romans 8:22). We feel helpless in the face of so much need, but the Holy Spirit "*comes to the aid of our weakness, for we do not know how to pray as we ought, but the Spirit itself intercedes with inexpressible groanings*" (Romans 8:26).

So we pray for the Church "*spread throughout the world*". We pray for mercy, salvation. We pray for the living and the dead. We pray for "*the whole Order of Bishops, all the clergy, those who take part in this offering, those gathered here before you, your entire people, and all who seek you with a sincere heart*". We

pray that “the whole creation” may be “*freed from the corruption of sin and death*” and so may glorify God.

The Mass is the universal prayer. Saint Justin Martyr wrote that, by his time, A.D. 150, the Mass was offered by Christians of every race and nation in the known world. Christianity was hardly more than a century old, and the Mass was already catholic. It was already offered wherever people could go to tell the good news.

It still is. We are Catholic because our love is universal. Our care is universal as well. Catholics are never narrow in their prayer. Though we arrive at Mass with all our private hopes and worries, we join them with the intention of the whole world, and with Christ, and in Christ, we make our intercession with the Father.

The Great Amen

We mentioned that only two Hebrew words have survived, untranslated, in common use in the Mass. One is *Alleluia*, the other is *Amen*. By this point in the Mass, we have already encountered the word *Amen* many times. It is the last word in most prayers – a kind of prayerful punctuation.

The word *Amen* completes a prayer. It signifies our consent to all the words that preceded it.

Jesus used it also as a preface to especially solemn teachings. He did this especially in connection with the

doctrine of the Eucharist. Four times in his Bread of Life discourse you will find him pronouncing a double *Amen*. Consider two examples:

“Amen, amen, I say to you, it was not Moses who gave the bread from heaven, my Father gives you the true bread from heaven” (John 6:32).

“Amen, amen, I say to you, unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink his blood, you do not have life within you” (John 6:53).

Amen, in this sacred context, means “truly”. It means “I believe”. It means “Yes”. In Jesus’ culture, it was pronounced as the affirmation of an oath. Those who pronounced it put their lives on the line. They committed themselves to a serious undertaking. They pledged their full and unreserved faith.

Curiously, it also means “Jesus”. In the Book of Revelation, we find an angel refer to Jesus as “*The Amen, the faithful and true witness*” (Revelation 3:14).

There are many *Amens* in the course of the Mass, but this is the great one because it follows the final doxology of the Eucharistic Prayer. We spoke a bit about doxologies in our discussion of the *Gloria*. The doxology usually serves as a finale to a prayer. In the case of the Church’s great prayer, the Eucharistic Prayer, the doxology is a grand finale indeed. The priest intones:

“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”.

And those words call forth from all believers a *Great Amen*.

What is so great about our *Amen*? WE find a clue in the ancient oracle of the Old Testament prophet Malachi (1:11), who foresaw the day of our sacrifice and rejoiced:

*“For from the rising of the sun, even to its setting,
my name is great among the nations,
and everywhere they bring sacrifice to my name,
and a pure offering,
For great is my name among the nations,
says the Lord of hosts”.*

The Lord’s Prayer

At the beginning of Jesus’ ministry, his disciples asked him, “Lord teach us to pray”, and Jesus delighted in this request. He responded by giving them the prayer we call the “Our Father” or “Lord’s Prayer” (see Luke 11:1-

4). The Church celebrates this as the most cherished prayer and gives it a prominent place at Mass. Indeed, it has been part of the worship of Christian assemblies since the very beginning of Christianity. The most ancient guide to the Liturgy, the *Didache*, from the first century, gives instructions for praying the Lord's Prayer daily. And the early Christians consistently connected this prayer with the Mass. Tertullian, in the second century, Saint Cyprian in the third century, and many others taught that the petition for "our daily bread" was a plea before God for the gift of the Eucharist.

The prayer has rightly been called a "summary of the whole Gospel". There are few prayers that should be so regularly on our lips and in our heart. There is no prayer so appropriate for this particular part of the Mass.

Here I would like to emphasize how the "Our Father" prepares us for Communion.

As the priest calls us to recite this prayer, he recognizes the audacity of what we are about to do. "At the Saviors' command and formed by divine teaching, we dare to say...". What is that we *dare* to say? "Our Father!".

Those opening words bring us face to face with the extraordinary revelation of Jesus Christ. He alone is the true, natural Son of God. Remember, in the *Creed*, we proclaimed him as "*God from God, light from light, true*

God from true God” – the only begotten Son of the Father.

Yet, he came among us so that he could make us co-heirs to his inheritance (see Romans 8:17, Galatians 3:29, Ephesians 3:6, Titus 3:7 and many other Scriptures). We share in his death and resurrection through our Baptism and our participation in the Eucharist. We become adopted children of God because we share the life of the natural Son of God. We share his life because he came to share ours. Saint Paul made this very clear: *“But when the fullness of time had come, God sent his Son, born of a woman, born under the law, to ransom those under the law, so that we might receive adoption. As proof that you are children, God sent the spirit of his Son into our hearts, crying out, ‘Abba, Father’. So you are no longer a slave but a child, and if a child then also an heir, through God”* (Galatians 4:4-7).

We have been called to this unique relationship with God out of our former sinful state. Each person, with the exception of Mary who was preserved from all stain of sin by a singular grace of God in view of the merits of her Son, is born in original sin, and into a world damaged by sin. But God *“delivered us from the power of darkness and transferred us to the kingdom of his beloved Son, in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins”* (Colossians 1:13-14). Saint Paul

speaks of this justifying mercy of God often, especially in his letter to the Romans.

The opening of the Lord's Prayer reminds us that we can call God "Our Father" because of the generous outpouring of the Holy Spirit on everyone who proclaims Jesus as Lord. The first of all God's gifts is the gift of himself. He desires to give himself to us perfectly in eternal life. But that giving begins now and arrives in a supreme way in the Mass.

There is a world of difference between knowing God as "our Father" and knowing him as "Creator" or "Lord". "Father" denotes a loving, familiar, familial relationship. It means he is our protector, friend, guide, teacher, provider, doing everything he does for us with a tender and personal affection. He is with us, transforming and making us children by adoption and sharers in his nature. He is present to unite us to himself (see John 17:22-23). He is present that he may be known. He wishes us all to grow in holiness and the life of prayer, so that we may more and more taste his presence as saints and mystics of every age have done.

Though he remains God and we remain creatures, somehow we are closely joined to him. WE share his life. We remain always finite and distinct from him who is the infinite Lord of all. But the mystery that transcends our understanding is that somehow God becomes so close to us that we can call him Father.

If God is our Father, then we must be brothers and sisters. This truth is at the heart of the Christian community – the Church. We are one with each other because we are one with Jesus the Lord. While there are many ways we might identify with other groups – our blood ties, ethnic origins, cultural interests – there is one reality that supersedes all these other bonds: union with each other in Christ.

To pray to God as “our Father” is to recognize that we have responsibilities to each other as members of the same family. We are not merely components of a cultural, political, economic or social entity. We are a faith community. If our faith is strong enough, we will recognize how deep our spiritual bonds are, and then we can accomplish that communion, that family life, that manifestation of the kingdom of God that Jesus calls for when he urges us to name God as “our Father”.

We call God our Father, but still we recognize his utter transcendence. We pray “Our Father, who art in heaven” and we “hallow” his name. We proclaim his name to be “Holy”, that is “set apart”. As close as we can now draw to the divine life – through the Holy Spirit and in Jesus Christ – God is still utterly beyond us, transcendent, all-holy and infinite, with limitless power and majesty. In the *Creed* we have professed our belief in the “*Father almighty*”. In the *Gloria* we have sung about the grandeur of the truth. At the beginning of the

Eucharistic Prayer, we hallowed God's name three times over: Holy, holy, holy! The Church unceasingly proclaims the glory of God.

No creature is worthy by nature to draw near to such glory, never mind speak in its presence. But the same divine perfection is also the root of perfect mercy, which heals sinners and calls them to communion to be divinized (see 2 Peter 1:4).

When we pray to "our Father" we recognize that it is God's holiness that attracts the human heart. It attracts us because of the goodness it implies, a goodness of such intensity that it dispels any servile fear and touches the sinful heart with awe and reverence.

The splendor and holiness of God must be taken seriously. God is holy and requires holiness he has shared with us. Thus, the fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom (see Proverbs 1:7). Still, the fear is not the cowering of a slave, but rather the awe of a child before a parent who can do so much, be so much, and give so much.

The disciples asked a simple question. They wanted a guidance in prayer, maybe a technique. Imagine their excitement when Jesus gave them not words of encouragement or mere methods, but the actual words of the prayer itself – perfect words that themselves reveal a new relationship – words that beg a familial

communion that comes, very soon, through the grace of “our daily bread”, the Holy Eucharist.

So we pray this prayer with special attention when we pray it in the Mass. As we do, we pray in continuity with the apostles and through them with Jesus as he gathers his Church. We pray in a way that is guaranteed to turn our heart and minds to God.

Your Bishop,

+ Camillo Ballin, mccc

Awali, Kingdom of Bahrain, 02 September 2019:

14th anniversary of my Episcopal Ordination.

REGULATIONS ON FASTING, ABSTINENCE, AND FEASTS

- 1. Fasting and abstinence** are prescribed for Ash Wednesday and Good Friday, limited to the ages of 21 to 60.
- 2. Abstinence** is prescribed as a general rule for every Friday in Lent, applicable to those 14 and above. But for particular circumstances in the Vicariate of Kuwait, abstinence is to be observed on the Wednesdays of Lent. Out of devotion,

abstinence may be observed every Wednesday during the year.

- 3. Eucharistic Fast:** The faithful must abstain from solids and liquids for one hour before receiving Holy Communion. This regulation is applicable to Masses celebrated in the morning, afternoon, evening or at midnight. Water does not break the fast. Those who are sick, even though not confined to bed, may take any liquid or food as well as medicines at any time before Holy Communion.

- 4. Feasts of Obligation:**
 - a. Sundays or Fridays or Saturday evenings
 - b. Christmas (25th December)
 - c. Solemnity of Mary Mother of God (January 1st)
 - d. Solemnity of Our Lady of Arabia, Patroness of both the Vicariates in the Gulf** (Second Sunday of Ordinary Time)
 - e. Feast of St. Thomas, 3rd July (obligation is only for the Syro-Malabar Rite)
 - f. Assumption of the Blessed Virgin Mary, 15th August
 - g. Nativity of the Blessed Virgin Mary, 8th September (obligation is only for the Syro-Malankara Rite)

- 5. Feasts of Devotion:**

- a. St. Joseph, 19th March
- b. St. Mark the Evangelist, 25th April (for the Coptic Rite)
- c. Saints Peter and Paul, 29th June
- d. All Saints Day, 1st November
- e. All Souls Day, 2nd November
- f. Immaculate Conception, 8th December

6. Feasts transferred to the following Friday or Sunday:

- a. Epiphany
- b. Corpus Christi
- c. Ascension
- d. St. Maroun, 9th February