

St. Michael's
Cathedral
Dun
Dec 6/59.

PO: The Prayers Before the Consecration (Introduction and Preface)

which is This evening, my dear brethren, we are going to consider briefly and, as it were, in a passing way, that part of the Mass which prepares us for the Consecration, the great centre, heart and essence of the sacrifice of the Mass. This preparatory part of the Mass extends from the Preface to the last short prayer before the consecration. This section of the Mass is also called the first part of the Canon of the Mass.

Perhaps it will help us to know what is meant by the Canon of the Mass. The canon comprises the prayers at Mass from the Preface to the Pater Noster or Our Father. The word canon refers means a rule or fixed measure and consists of parts of the Mass which, with slight exceptions, do not change but are the same for every Mass. It is interesting to reflect that in the beginning it was just the opposite. In the earliest Church the Presbyter himself provided fitting prayers to surround the consecration. St. Justin Martyr, who wrote in the second century: "He who presides offers Eucharistic prayers and thanksgiving according to his ability." Later, for the sake of uniformity and to ensure that these prayers were the most fitting possible, the Church fixed and set the wording of the beautiful and appropriate prayers surrounding the consecration. These we call the Canon or fixed prayers and as we have them to-day they go back at least to the fifth century.

The Canon begins with the Preface. The preface sounds the theme of the whole Eucharistic sacrifice, which is one of thanksgiving. The word Eucharist itself means thanksgiving. How fitting that we should be thankful for the coming of Christ first into the world to save us;

- (2) secondly into our altar to visit us and apply the fruits of Calvary and
- (3) thirdly into our hearts through Holy Communion to unite Himself with us and to sanctify us.

So we give thanks in the preface and the priest
begins this prayer with the words "lift up
your hearts" Surely we have room enough at
Mass to lift up our hearts, above our worries
& even grievous sufferings in the knowledge that
Christ, who can take care of us and them,
and has taken our sins on his shoulders is
coming down upon our altar and into our hearts
and souls. So the priest continues: "let us
give thanks" and then "We should at all
times and in all places give thanks to thee,
O holy God, Father Almighty." The preface
has been called worthy of a choir of angels. It
ends with that beautiful prayer the "Sanctus"
one of the most ancient in the Church, mentioned
by St. Clement of Rome who died in the
year 104.

In the sanctus Thanksgiving blends into praise:
"Holy, Holy, Holy, God God of the celestial hosts,
Heaven and earth are full of thy glory."

100: From the Te igitur to the "Agnus Oblationem"

All of the prayers that follow the preface up to the consecration refer to the Act of Sacrifice to take place. By the time the sacristan has been stopped saying the priest is saying the Te igitur or Prayer for the Church. The priest invokes the fruits of the Mass in the Church, the spouse of Christ, in the pope and the Bishop, who are mentioned by name. This petition recalls the prayer of Christ for His disciples at the Last Supper.

Then comes the "memento Domini" or Memento for the Living. During this prayer the priest folds his hands and mentally recalls those of the living to whom he wishes to apply the Holy Sacrifice. The faithful should also recall their intentions at this time. Why not here remember living benefactors, relatives, or the sick or the dying, or the suffering; or the mentally ill or the pagan or godless world? The priest prays here also for all those present. The faithful too should pray for their companions present in the Church whose lives have emerged, met, and then go their separate ways - we pray ~~to God~~ in grace.

The next prayer is the Commemoration of the Saints. The prayers of priest and people are here united with those of the saints in glory. First in the list comes Mary, "Mother of Our Lord and God and Lord Jesus Christ." Then come the names of 12 apostles and 12 martyrs, an account of their lives ~~spread across~~ ^{throughout} the first 400 years of the Church's existence. It is embarrassing to be privileged to unite our prayers with theirs.

After the commemoration of the Saints is the "Hanc igitur" or Preparation for the Consecration. During this prayer the priest places his hands over the bread and wine and the bell rings to remind us that the consecration is at hand. In the sacrifice of atonement in the Old Law the high priest placed his hands upon the head of the animal before it was slain to indicate that the sins of the people had been transferred to the victim of the sacrifice. In the Mass the priest, and through him the people, virtually touch the sacrifice and in a symbolic manner transfer their sins to the elements which are to become the body &

Blood of Our Lord Jesus Christ, the scapegoat for
our offenses.

There is another very brief prayer before the
consecration, called the "Oratio Oblationum" in
which the bread & wine are given a final & special
blessing.

Such are the prayers in preparation for that
great moment of the consecration when the altar
again becomes the table of the Last Supper, the priest
stands in the place of Christ and the self-same
words which Christ uttered are again pronounced in
another tongue but with the same effect:
Bread and wine become the Living Christ.

May I suggest, my dear brethren, that we who
are privileged to return through the Mass to the
Last Supper and to Eucharist continually study the
Mass, assist at it with greater attention and
devotion and participate with more closely
united with the priest and other members of the
congregation - ~~staying always through grace to remembering~~
that we are all one in Christ Our Saviour. Amen.