

Sunday, August 5, 2007

***Reflections on the Church at Prayer***  
"Homily and Intercessions"

The Bishop is the teacher in the local church. By tradition and delegation from the bishop, priests and deacons are the ministers of preaching. The preacher in the Catholic community is to make the scriptures come alive to those gathered. The scriptures, when heard, evoke response. The task of the homily is to instruct the faithful from the texts of the liturgy. A homily is two-dimensional: 1) the homilist's remarks, and 2) the integration of the texts, the preacher's comments, and the experience of the listener. There are times when qualified individuals may give a reflection on scripture. At times an appeal, a "witness talk", Vespers, funeral vigil, retreat activity, and other specially designated services of the Word may be led in a scriptural reflection by a lay person of faith. Sometimes a homily may be instructional such as at a special event or ritual.

A sermon is a talk on spiritual topics often independent of the scriptures proclaimed at a prayer service. This often occurs when there is a series of lessons to be shared with a congregation. For example: a series of talks of stewardship, morality, and pastoral letters from bishops, which are necessary for all to hear. Yet, the Church wants the people to hear these instructions as based in the texts of scripture. A presider or other minister may select appropriate readings on such occasions. Alternate Scriptures for a day might be selected for a wedding, funeral, ordination, anointing of the sick, at the start of a building project, new school year, etc.

A homily is an instruction on the Scriptures proclaimed at prayer that teach about the texts in such a manner that the congregation may make application to their life. This is the usual form of teaching and preaching within the context of prayer. The Rites of all the Sacraments call for the reading of scripture and a homily or instruction. This is true in the Confessional, as a Rite of Reconciliation may be prayed with priest and penitent. It is just as true at the Lord's Day Mass, as at "the anointing and viaticum" service of the sick and dying. A homily may be in the form of an instruction on the occasion of ordination, or a wedding, or a retreat or special gathering.

Preachers vary in how they present the homily. No matter how it is presented, who preaches, or the style of the material, the responsibility for preaching is twofold:

- 1) The preacher must attempt to know and present to the assembled so as to offer a reflection that is age appropriate and insightful to the congregation.
- 2) Those who hear must listen in such a manner to make application to their own state in life and stage along the journey of faith.

The General Intercessions belong to the faithful. In fact, one must be baptized to participate in the litany of prayers that conclude the Liturgy of the Word. These prayers for the Church, world leaders, the needy, poor, and suffering among us, are the "prayer of the faithful". As the Psalm is the congregation's act of proclaiming God's Word, so too the General Intercessions are the voiced prayers arising from the prayer of the assembly. The intercessions, when voiced, acknowledge God as our provider, Jesus as the way of salvation, and the Spirit as our hope and promise. The Intercessions always conclude the Liturgy of the Word. In a service without the Eucharist, the Lord's Prayer would conclude the rituals such as an anointing at a bedside, funeral home or graveside service, morning or evening prayer.

Sunday, August 12, 2007

### ***Reflections on the Church at Prayer***

#### **"The Presentation of Gifts"**

The Acts of the Apostles tells of gatherings of the first Christians. *"They came and laid their possessions at the feet of the Apostles for the sake of those in need."* This practice continues today in the "Presentation of Gifts" at the Lord's Day Eucharist. A collection is taken for the ministry of the church. Biblical "tithing" or the giving of first fruits and benefits, is collected and brought before the altar. Money has become the most convenient means of tithing in our society and the church today.

This offering has several uses:

- Reminds us of our grateful dependency upon the Lord.
- Supports the many services of the local congregation.
- Provides assistance to outreach ministries for the poor, elderly, the hungry, and the members of the church.
- Pays the bills of the local congregation including salaries, utilities, maintenance, and supplies.
- Pays the Archdiocesan tax paid by the parish on an annual basis.
- Provides for worship, education, Christian Formation and administration of the congregation.
- Special Offerings may also be received at this time: Food Panty, St. Vincent DePaul, Emergency Relief for Disaster Victims, etc.

Bread and Wine are then presented as the sign to all that we present ourselves as a congregation desiring to be a living sacrifice to the Lord, that we too wish to be blessed, broken, and poured out in loving service.

The gifts of the people are received and prepared for the sacrifice in the "presentation of gifts", "an acceptable sacrifice" to the creator.

Since this is the presentation of gifts, when is the "offertory" of the liturgy? (Keep reading to answer that question!)

Sunday, August 19, 2007

### ***Reflections on the Church at Prayer***

#### **"The Eucharistic Prayer" – Part 1**

The Eucharistic Prayer or "Great Prayer of Thanksgiving" echoes the Liturgy of the Word. "Remembering and giving thanks" we respond to God's invitation that we follow the command of Jesus in faithful discipleship at the Lord's Table. The structure of the Liturgy of the Word is the structure also of the Eucharist Prayer: 1) establishes leadership, 2) names God, 3) presents a reason to give thanks, 4) invites a scriptural response from the congregation in song, 5) transforms the ordinary: word, bread, wine, and people into the sacred presence of Christ, just as was accomplished by the proclamation of the Gospel text, 6) invites a profession of faith, 7) prays for the church and the world, and 8) makes an offering to the Lord in the "Doxology and Amen".

- 1) The Preface Dialogue: The priest invites all present to join in one heart and voice to praise God. The people respond, "it is right to give God thanks and praise".
- 2) The initial portion or thematic prayer of praise is sung or recited by the priest, stating why it is our duty and salvation to praise God for all that has been accomplished for our salvation.
- 3) "Holy, Holy, Holy" responds the assembly in the scriptural text of the Prophet Isaiah declaring that God is great and intimately near to all those who call on the sacred name.

This first section of the Eucharistic Prayer may reflect various aspects of God's mercy and goodness. These themes may be praise, creation, new creation, festivals in our salvation history, honor of holy men and women, ritual prayers of weddings, funerals, etc.

In the next article we will examine Epeclasis and Memorial parts of the Eucharistic Prayer.

Sunday, August 26, 2007

### *Reflections on the Church at Prayer*

#### The Eucharistic Prayer – Part 2

The Eucharistic Prayer having begun with a dialog, thematic prayer of praise, and the "Holy, Holy, Holy" continues. The prayer enters its middle section with four elements: 1) remembering God's work of salvation in history, 2) calling down of the Holy Spirit upon the gifts presented, 3) the memorial recalling of what we now call the Triduum and its acclamation, and 4) the calling down of the Holy Spirit upon all who comprise the "Body of Christ".

- 1) From the earliest accounts of the Eucharistic Prayer, the Bishop stood in the midst of the faithful and prayed as long and as well he could, recalling God's work of salvation. Jesus now becomes the mediator of salvation between the Jewish disciples and the first Christians.
- 2) Then the prayer develops into the first of two sections in which the Holy Spirit is invoked to again make Jesus present among us: "let your spirit come upon these gifts that they may become the body and blood of Christ . . .".
- 3) Now the Church remembers the events memorialized in the Triduum: the last supper, the death, and resurrection of the Lord. This memorial prayer is then given acclamation by all the faithful in the profession of faith: "Christ has died. Christ is risen, Christ will come again."
- 4) Moving on in the prayer, the priest now evokes the sending forth of the Spirit a second time saying, "let your spirit come upon all who share this bread and wine, making us one bread, one body in Christ".

Recall the structure of the Liturgy of the Word and you will see the same structure in this prayer. Both the Liturgy of the Word and Eucharist tell of salvation history, proclaim the Gospel of Jesus making us one in the risen Christ, and contain a profession of faith. Both the Liturgy of Word and the Eucharistic Prayer conclude with prayers of intercession for the world, the church, and a remembrance of the dead.

The Eucharistic Prayer now concludes with the Doxology and Amen. The priest now raises bread and wine in the sign of offering and sings: "through Him, with Him and in Him, in the unity of the Holy Spirit, all glory and honor is yours almighty Father forever and ever". All acclaim with, "AMEN"!

Throughout the centuries the Church has prayed this prayer standing together in the presence of the Bishop or Priest. This is not a prayer of adoration; rather an active participation by all present in the renewal of our life in Christ. We pray that we, like this bread and wine we share, may be transformed into the living presence of Christ! Standing is the historical posture whenever the Gospel is proclaimed and the faithful pray in acclamation, intercession, or thanksgiving. So when is the "consecration"? The entire prayer is a consecration of the faithful and bread and wine as the body of Christ! When is the "offertory"? The offertory is the Doxology when the body of Christ in the elements of bread and wine, and the body of the faithful are given to God in the conclusion and great Amen of the Eucharistic Prayer.