

Script – Episode 4 – The Preparation of the Gifts, The Preface, The Sanctus

Our participation in the Liturgy of the Word was centred on opening ourselves fully to the Word of God proclaimed to us. Now in the Liturgy of the Eucharist, our focus of attention shifts from the pulpit to the altar as we prepare ourselves to join our sacrifice with the sacrifice of our Lord Jesus Christ.

The Liturgy of the Eucharist begins with the Preparation of the Gifts or Offertory. After a collection from the congregation, bread & wine and the collection are offered as gifts by us. While the gifts are brought from the congregation to the priest in a procession, we sing a hymn to unify ourselves with the action of those who represent us in this procession.

What is the significance of this procession? Our bringing these gifts to the priest emphasizes the fact that we are offering ourselves together with our gifts in the Eucharistic celebration. We offer our lives as a living sacrifice, giving ourselves, all that we have and all that we do to God and to live our lives for God's glory and honour. And as the gifts of bread and wine are going to be transformed into the Body and Blood of Christ, we pray that our lives are also transformed by the grace of God through participating in the sacrament.

Contributing to the collection can also be seen in the same light. It is not simply a contribution to the church upkeep or some good cause, It, too, expresses the giving of our lives to God. Our money embodies hours of our lives and hard work, which we now offer to God.

The priest accepts our gifts and they are then brought to the altar where Christ's perfect sacrifice is made present. It is only by joining ourselves to Christ that our imperfect sacrifices are sanctified, perfected and made truly acceptable to the Father.

The rite then continues with the priest blessing the bread and pouring wine and a little bit of water into the chalice as he prays:

"By mystery of this water and wine may we come to share in the divinity of Christ who humbled himself to share in our humanity."

His prayer requests that we who participate in this Mass may come to share in the divinity of Christ, symbolized by the wine, who humbled Himself to share in our humanity, symbolized by the drop of water.

The priest next says two prayers quietly. The first is a prayer of contrition:

"With humble spirit and contrite heart may we be acceptable by you, O Lord, and may our sacrifice in your sight this day be pleasing to you, Lord God."

Notice how the sacrifice envisioned in this prayer is not some things being offered to God, like bread and wine, but "we".

The second prayer accompanies the "washing of hands." It signifies his wish to be cleansed of his sins so that he is worthy to offer the sacrifice. The gifts of bread and wine on the altar will soon be changed into Christ's very body and blood. Jesus, the one true High Priest, will accomplish this through the priest's hands. In preparation for this most sacred moment, the priest prays silently as he washes his hands:

"Wash me thoroughly from my iniquity, and cleanse me from my sin!"

Finally turning to face to congregation, he extends and then joins his hands saying:

"Pray, brethren, that my sacrifice and yours may be acceptable to God, the Almighty Father."

"My sacrifice" points to Christ's sacrifice which will be made present through the priest who acts "in the person of Christ". The "yours" part of the sacrifice refers to the entire Church offering itself in union with Christ in the Mass.

We stand and respond with a prayer:

"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."

We are not mere silent spectators. As the priest offers our gifts, so we offer ourselves and all that we have - our everyday living in bearing Christian witness, our work, prayers, our family life, leisure, and even our hardships, cares and worries - and join them to the perfect sacrifice of Christ for the salvation of the world.

We are now at the threshold of the very heart of the Mass - the Eucharistic Prayer - and we are invited to pause, to reflect and to lift our hearts and minds to God.

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.

This dialogue between the priest and us introduces the Preface.

"Lift up your hearts" is a summon to give God our fullest attention. In biblical usage, the heart of a person is his whole being. We should now set aside all other concerns and lift up our thoughts, our love and our hope to God.

Next we are invited to participate fully and joyfully in the prayer of thanksgiving. Our response "It is right and just" reminds us that it is not only a good thing to give thanks to God, but it is also our duty and responsibility as his creatures. It is important for us to understand that while the priest will say many of the prayers during this part of the Mass, he is saying them for all of us who are offering this Mass to God with him.

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. Essentially, we give thanks to God the Father, listing the many works of the Father that we experience in the world He has created. We thank Him for sending his Son and the Holy Spirit to save us from sin and the Evil One. We also humbly express our gratitude that the redemptive act of Christ's death and resurrection is about to be made present to us in the liturgy.

The Preface concludes with all of us, who have lifted our hearts up to the Lord, joining with all the angels and saints in praising God's glory with one voice:

"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."

"Holy, Holy, Holy" is a song that the angels sing forever in heaven. In the Old Testament, Prophet Isaiah reports a vision of heaven with "the Lord sitting upon a throne .. and above him stood seraphs ...calling to one another in an ecstatic hymn of praise: "Holy, Holy, Holy is the Lord of hosts. The whole earth is full of his glory"" (Is 6:1-3). And in the Book of Revelation, St John repeats this detail as he describes his own mystical experience of heaven: "The four living creatures .. day and night they do not stop exclaiming: "Holy, Holy, Holy is the Lord God almighty, who was, and who is and who is to come."" (Rev 4:8).

This song also includes the words of praise given to Jesus as he entered Jerusalem : "Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord; hosanna in the highest". The Hebrew word "Hosanna" essentially means "save us, we pray". It

is the recognition that Jesus is the Messiah and Lord, and it is a cry for our own salvation.

As soon as we finish singing "Holy, Holy, Holy," we fall to our knees in reverence as we welcome our King, the all-holy divine Lord, who will with us in the Real Presence of the Eucharist.