

## Explaining the Mass

With Fr. Mark Bentz, STL

### Part 10: *Super oblata* and Preface

After the priest has offered the bread and wine brought by the people, and invited all to stand, he offers the second “priestly prayer” of the mass. If you remember, the first priestly prayer was the *collect* at the beginning of mass preceded by the invitation: “Let us pray.” This second priestly prayer is called the *super oblata*, which means ‘over the offerings.’ The priest prays this prayer alone, with hands extended, on behalf of the whole Church. It is at this time and at the other two ‘priestly prayers’ that we see the priest’s role as intercessor most clearly. It is a very succinct prayer that stirs us to contemplate the Eucharistic mystery that will soon be made manifest before our eyes on the altar!

After the prayer over the offerings, the Eucharistic prayer begins. Many people think that the prayers that follow are disconnected, but this is not the case. From the “preface” to the “great Amen” it is one prayer, admittedly with several parts. The *General Instruction* says:

“Now the center and high point of the entire celebration begins, namely, the Eucharistic Prayer itself, that is, the prayer of thanksgiving and sanctification. The Priest calls upon the people to lift up their hearts towards the Lord in prayer and thanksgiving; he associates the people with himself in the Prayer that he addresses in the name of the entire community to God the Father through Jesus Christ in the Holy Spirit. Furthermore, the meaning of this Prayer is that the whole congregation of the faithful joins with Christ in confessing the great deeds of God and in the offering of Sacrifice. The Eucharistic Prayer requires that everybody listens to it with reverence and in silence.”<sup>1</sup>

As we mentioned last time, the priesthood of the laity and the ordained priesthood are related, but different. They differ not just in degree, but in *essence*. Both priest and people offer the one sacrifice of Christ to the Father, but their *participation* in the sacrifice is different. The priest acts in the person of Christ the head, while the laity act as the members of Christ. One doesn’t exist without the other, but not all have the same role. *Full, active, and conscious* participation is required by all at Mass, meaning that at times we speak or sing, at times we listen, but at all times our *hearts* are attentive to what is happening at the mass. “Full and active” participation during the Eucharistic prayer requires attentive watching and listening so that we can adequately receive the mystery.

The first part of the Eucharistic prayer is the preface. The dialogue begins between priest and people: “The Lord be with you. *And with your Spirit*. Lift up your hearts. *We lift them up to the Lord*. Let us give thanks to the Lord our God. *It is right and just*.” The priest then continues “It is truly right and just...” This was a great change that happened with the new translation of the Mass—every preface begins with this echo of the people’s response, showing the continuity between the prayer of the priest and the people. In the prior translation, there was a disconnect, giving the illusion of two separate

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<sup>1</sup> GIRM 78.

prayers. In the English Roman missal there are several options for a preface to choose from, depending on what kind of feast day or celebration is happening. By my count, there are 52 proper prefaces, and a few extra for the biggest feasts! Each one is a masterpiece of theology and prayer, expressing the belief of the Church regarding the particular feast, as well as offering thanks to God for the gift of salvation in Christ. Many times, the preface is a 'mini Gospel' that could be preached on!

At the conclusion of the preface, the priest reminds us that we are worshipping along with the angels and the saints in their endless song of praise. The *Sanctus* or "Holy, Holy, Holy" is straight from the book of Revelation and should make us think about what is really happening at this moment:

"After this I looked, and lo, in heaven an open door! ... lo, a throne stood in heaven, with one seated on the throne! And he who sat there appeared like jasper and carnelian, and round the throne was a rainbow that looked like an emerald. Round the throne were twenty-four thrones, and seated on the thrones were twenty-four elders, clad in white garments, with golden crowns upon their heads... And round the throne, on each side of the throne, are four living creatures ... day and night they never cease to sing, "**Holy, holy, holy**, is the Lord God Almighty, who was and is and is to come! And whenever the living creatures give glory and honor and thanks to him who is seated on the throne, who lives for ever and ever, the twenty-four elders fall down before him who is seated on the throne and worship him who lives for ever and ever; they cast their crowns before the throne, singing, "Worthy art thou, our Lord and God..." (Revelation 4:1-11)