

## “Prepositions”

Prepositions abound in our prayers; so much so that sometimes I wonder about spontaneous public prayers I utter may be prepositional layer-cakes of a sort. We utter phrases like *“in Christ” “with Christ” “for Christ,” “from Christ,” “to Christ,”* among others. These prepositions are all relational terms which are attempts to describe the mystery of the divine life into which Christ invites us. For example, in chapter seventeen of John’s Gospel, Jesus’ long prayer for his disciples is that they have a relationship with him which is like the one he has with the Heavenly Father: It is a relationship which is sometimes termed “mutual indwelling.” I would suggest that Jesus is alluding to a relationship vastly more intimate than the most intimate human relationship, the one-flesh union of husband and wife, (Erase thoughts of sexual union. It surely transcends this category.)

In this reflection I thought I would hone in on the three prepositions which dominate our celebration of Mass: It is in the “doxology” spoken at the end of the Eucharistic prayer, while the body and blood of the Crucified Lord is held aloft by the Presider-Priest, that the three-fold expression is heard, **“Through Him, With Him, and In Him . . .”** I believe that this moment could be taken-up as an interpretive key to the whole Mass. It is a clear explication of how we are saved and why the Mass is the perfect worship we can offer to God the Father.

Consider the following image: As the priest holds the Body and Blood of Christ above the altar, (represented under the signs of bread and wine), it is as if He were holding a mirror and reflecting God’s image back to God. After all, this notion is expressed at the beginning of the Letter to the Hebrews wherein it says, *“[the] son . . . is the **refulgence of his glory, the very imprint of His being.** . . . (Hebrews 1:3).* If, as we understand it, the Crucified Lord becomes really present on our altar as the perfect sacrifice to be offered for our sins and the sins of the whole world then we are, indeed, reflecting the Second Person of the Trinity back to the Father.

My point here is to help us acknowledge that we have no merits of our own by which we can be saved. What we have is the word of Jesus who said, **“No one comes to the Father except through me, “**

(Jn 14:6). The “through” in this passage and at the Mass are, obviously, related. It is “through” his perfect sacrifice of love and obedience, all the way to the Cross, that Jesus takes upon himself the cost of our sins. At the very same time, because He left us the perpetual memorial of that once-and-for-all sacrifice, we are able to offer it to the Father as perfect worship. It is, as if to say . . .

*“Father, I have nothing of any worth to offer for the remission of my sins. I only have my faith in the Crucified One. Today, I offer Him to you as I place my entire trust in what he has accomplished for us.”*

At the same moment this is happening, we apply any and all personal sacrifices we have to offer from the week gone by. These add nothing to the perfection of Christ’s Sacrifice, but they engage our real lives in the cooperation with the graces of God outpoured.



Hence, at every Mass, the Crucified Lord is received upon the Altar of God in Heaven and, instantaneously returned to us as the Glorified Lord in the Sacrament of Holy Communion. In the actions of the priest at the altar, this mystery corresponds to the elevation above the altar which is accompanied by the “Through Him , With Him, In Him,” and the descent upon the same altar accompanied by “Alleluia!”

**“Through Him”** . . . we offer perfect worship, in Spirit and Truth.

**“With Him”**. . . we are, always and everywhere, accompanied by our Lord on our pilgrim journey.

**“In Him”** . . . though we consume Him in the Sacrament, in truth we are taken-up into His divine life in the sense spoken by St. Paul, wherein he says, **“It is no longer I who live but Christ living in me,”** (Gal. 2:20)