



## FR. DANIEL'S CORNER

Mass Moment: Part 23

### THE EUCHARISTIC PRAYER (Anaphora).

After the acclamation (the Holy, Holy, Holy), the congregation kneels while the priest, standing with arms outstretched, offers up the prayer (Anaphora) directly addressed to God the Father. This indicates even more clearly that the whole body directs its prayer to the Father only through its head, Christ. The Anaphora is the most solemn part of the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass, during which the offerings of bread and wine are consecrated as the body and blood of Christ. There are four main Eucharistic Prayers, also called **Canon** (I, II, III, IV). However, there are also four for *Masses for Various Needs* (I, II, III, IV) and two for *Reconciliation* (I, II). They are purely biblical in theology and in language, they possess a rich overtone from its Latin origins.

It is important to note the elements that are central and uniform all through the various Eucharistic Prayers: the praise of God, thanksgiving, invocation of the Holy Spirit (also known as *Epiclesis*), the *Anamnesis*— that is the memorial “do this in memory of me,” the Church offers up Christ our oblation to the Father through the Holy Spirit, then the *doxology*— the great Amen.

The first Canon is the longest and it includes the special *communicates*— that is asking the Father to accept this offering in union with the whole Church. The second Canon is the shortest and often used for daily Masses. It is said to be the oldest of the four *Anaphoras* by St. Hippolytus around 215 A.D. It has its own preface, but it also adapts and uses other prefaces too. The third Eucharistic Prayer is said to be based on the ancient Alexandrian, Byzantine, and Maronite *Anaphoras*, rich in sacrificial theology. It is used mostly for Sundays and some of the Holy Days. It accommodates all other appropriate prefaces. The fourth and final Canon has its own fixed preface that connects directly to the Canon. It speaks powerful of the history of salvation and of Christ who is at the center of history (Charles Belmonte, *Understanding the Mass*, 126).

*Epiclesis* which literally means “calling down upon” is a liturgical term referring in a strict sense to the invocation to the Father that he sends the Holy Spirit upon the Church’s gifts. In acknowledging what God has done for us in creation and history, we are immediately directed to the sacrifice in the gifts of bread and wine. *Therefore*, we now ask that the bread and wine on the altar be changed. This is the petition of the first *Epiclesis*: “that they may become the body and blood of Jesus Christ.” This prayer is accompanied by a simple but powerful gesture: the priest’s hands are stretched out over the bread and wine. It is a rendering visible, if you will, of what is, of course, invisible.

Some writers find a parallel of the *Epiclesis* between the Jews who pleaded with God to send the Messiah and the priest who now pleads with the Father that Christ, the Lord, Messiah, priest, and king be made known again, in the Eucharist. In the *Epiclesis*, the invocation makes it clear that it is the work of the Father to sanctify these gifts, the priest symbolically extends his hands over the offerings. Interestingly, this gesture is found in the Mosaic ritual tradition of atonement. The high priest symbolically places his hands on the head of the scapegoat thereby putting on the goat all the sins of the people (see Lev.16:21).

Again, this gesture is repeated at the ordination rite of a priest as the Holy Spirit is called upon the man who is to be ordained. The actions of the Holy Spirit in salvation history are fundamental to what Catholics believe— by the power of the Holy Spirit, the young virgin conceived at the Incarnation therefore becoming ‘*Theotokos*’ - Mother of God. By the same Holy Spirit at Jesus’ baptism in the Jordan River, the Father shows the world the beloved Son. The same Holy Spirit came upon the apostles at Pentecost as flames of fire, cleansing their tongues to proclaim the ‘goodnews’ in different languages. It is the same Holy Spirit who gives life to the Mystical Body of Christ; the people of all races, tribes, and tongues, who by sharing in the Eucharist are truly brothers and sisters of the Lord.

Coming up next will be the Institution Narrative, Anamnesis, and Doxology.

*And that is your Mass Moment for the week.*