• Why is Mass the best prayer we can offer?

There are many ways and many reasons we could give to answer this question, but I think if we understand what is happening as we pray the Eucharistic Prayer, we can truly appreciate the reason for saying this. The word “Eucharist” comes from the Greek word meaning “to give thanks.” The Eucharistic Prayer, then, is a prayer of blessing and thanksgiving, corresponding to Christ’s blessing of the bread and wine. In this prayer, which is the high point of the entire Mass, we celebrate and are invited to experience in faith the very mystery of salvation. We are united to Christ’s death, resurrection, and ascension and the pouring forth of the Holy Spirit on Pentecost. What we pray for is not simply the transformation of bread and wine into the very body and blood of Christ. When we enter into this prayer we are united in heart, mind, and voice with the heavenly host, crying out to the Father, “Holy! Holy! Holy!” As our prayer ascends to the Father, He hears the voice of his beloved one, Jesus Christ, and responds. We ask the Father to pour forth the Holy Spirit (epiclesis) so that our human gifts of bread and wine become Christ’s body and blood. Christ’s own words are solemnly spoken: “This is my body … this is my blood.” And our God responds by pouring out the Holy Spirit upon our gifts.

We are now not only in the presence of God, but also in the very heart of the eternal God. For the Church, this prayer opens us to eternity and, therefore, unites us to Christ’s very act of salvation—his self-offering on the cross. We remember (anamnesis), as Christ commanded us, but in a way that brings the death and resurrection of Christ, and its fruits, into our here-and-now. In making this prayer we are uniting ourselves to the once-and-for-all sacrifice of Christ, his one offering to the Father and, with Christ, we empty ourselves of all that is not of God. This is possible because we now pray not only that the gifts of bread and wine be transformed, but that we, too, will be transformed into the Body of Christ by the Holy Spirit (epiclesis). Therefore, this prayer not only seeks to make Christ present in the Eucharistic elements, but also to make Christ present in the world through us. As we conclude this prayer we are being prepared to receive Christ’s gift of self.

As we celebrate the Mass then, we are called to recognize that we are coming into the very presence of God—we enter into eternity itself. We come to experience the reality of our salvation through our remembrance of Jesus’ death, resurrection, and ascension; we come to participate in Christ’s very act of salvation. In this experience we recognize what our lives are truly about and Who our true foundation is. Christian life is really about one thing: being saved in Christ, and that is what the Mass helps us to experience. Thus, in the Mass we offer praise and thanksgiving to God for this tremendous gift that He gives to us through Christ.

What better prayer could we offer to God than this?