

## **Lesson 18: The Eucharist Prayer The Epiclesis**

Our last liturgy lesson focused on the content of the four great Eucharistic prayers, the ones we hear most often in our Masses. Today, we discuss the first key element of the Eucharistic Prayer, the epiclesis.

### **Action:**

In the epiclesis, the priest holds his hands outstretched over the gifts of bread and wine. With arms outstretched and palms down he says the prayer, making a sign of the cross over the gifts with his right hand. At this time the priest may slightly lower his voice and say the words of the prayer slightly slower. The bell may even be rung just before he begins the prayer.

### **History:**

Epiclesis is a Greek word that means to “invoke upon.” The Holy Spirit is invoked to affect the transubstantiation (transforming the substance or essence) of the gifts of bread and wine into the Body and Blood of Jesus Christ. The prayer is very ancient and its wording has varied but it was probably included in the first Eucharistic prayers that were offered by the Apostles. It was certainly included in all of the early written Anaphoras. The point is clear that we find everywhere a petition for a divine intervention that will affect the gifts so that they may be sanctified.

The epiclesis asks God the Father to send His Holy Spirit upon the gifts of bread and wine so that they will become for us the Body and Blood of our Lord, Jesus Christ.

In each of the nine different Eucharistic Prayers, the action of the priest during the epiclesis is the same: he holds his hands, palms down over the gifts.

In the Eastern Churches, this is the moment when they believe that the bread and wine become the Body and Blood of Jesus. But in the Western Church (Latin Rite to which we belong), it is believed that it is at the moment when the priest says the words of institution.

There is a second part to the epiclesis that invokes the Holy Spirit again, asking that all who share in the Body and Blood of Christ will be brought together in unity and become one body and one spirit in Christ.

**What we can do to better participate in this part of the Mass.**

Do not miss the richness of the epiclesis. As the priest holds his hands over the gifts and invokes the Holy Spirit imagine the Spirit's life-giving power as He moved over the primal waters in the first moments of creation. Imagine the power of the Spirit overshadowing Mary when Christ became incarnate. And now, the Spirit is preparing to change the bread and wine into the real Body and Blood of Christ and it is the Holy Spirit who, when we receive the Lord, causes us to become part of the one Body of Christ.