

LOOKING THROUGH STAINED GLASS



A Column by Fr. Tom

The Mass, Part 11 - Hocus Pocus? No. Magic? No. A Miracle? Absolutely!

As we continue our discussion of the Mass, and particularly the Liturgy of the Eucharist, we have come to the most amazing, the most powerful, and the greatest mystery of the Mass – the consecration of the bread and wine into the Body and Blood of Jesus Christ. This consecration specifically takes place during the Eucharistic Prayer.

The Eucharistic Prayer is the central prayer of the Mass and the prayer that re-presents the Last Supper of Jesus, where He gave Himself to His apostles and now to us. In order to prepare ourselves for this most important of prayers, the priest leads us in the **Preface**, which expresses our thanksgiving and praise to God, as we are united “with [angels and saints], as without end we proclaim” the **Sanctus**, or “Holy, Holy, Holy.”

The Eucharistic Prayer then continues with the **Epiclesis**, where “the Church implores the power of the Holy Spirit that the gifts offered by human hands be consecrated.” [*General Instruction of the Roman Missal (GIRM)*, 79c.]

Following the epiclesis are the **Institution Narrative and Consecration**, where the priest repeats “the words and actions of [that] Christ himself instituted during the Last Supper, when he offered his Body and Blood under the species of bread and wine, gave them to the Apostles to eat and drink, and [left them] the command to perpetuate this same mystery.” [*GIRM*, 79d.] (By the way, the phrase “hocus pocus” may have come from a parody of this portion of the Mass, when the Mass was proclaimed in Latin. The Latin phrase, “*hoc est corpus meum*” means “This is my body.” To ridicule Catholics, the term “hocus pocus” was used to

describe the “magic” of bread and wine becoming the Body and Blood of Christ.)

Just as the Passion of our Lord followed quickly on the heels of the Last Supper, our **Anamnesis**, or recalling of the core of our faith – His Passion, Death and Resurrection, follows the institutional narrative and consecration. During the anamnesis, we answer the call of the priest, “The mystery of faith,” with a statement about that mystery, such as, “We profess your Death, O Lord, and profess your Resurrection until you come again.”

Next, during the **Oblation**, “the Church, [...] gathered here and now, offers the unblemished sacrificial Victim [Jesus] in the Holy Spirit to the Father. The Church’s intention, indeed, is that the faithful not only offer this unblemished sacrificial Victim but also learn to offer their very selves.” [*GIRM*, 79f.]

As we do in many of our prayers, we offer **Intercessions** (prayers for ourselves and others) during the Eucharistic Prayer. For example, it is during this portion of the prayer that we pray for ourselves, the Church and the deceased.

The Eucharistic Prayer is concluded as all good prayers are – with a **Doxology**, or statement “by which the glorification of God is expressed and which is affirmed and concluded by the people’s acclamation Amen.” [*GIRM*, 79h.]

After the Eucharistic Prayer, the Body and Blood of Christ are ready to be distributed to all the faithful. Next week, we will discuss the Communion rite, by which we make our final preparations and receive this most awesome gift.

