

# LOOKING THROUGH STAINED GLASS



A Column by Fr. Tom

## The Mass, Part 13 – Did Father Lose a Contact Lens?

After a two-week hiatus for Christmas and New Year's, we return now to our discussion about the Mass. Before we discuss the final section of the Mass, the "Farewell," or Concluding Rites, it might be good for us to discuss some of the strange behavior of the priest (and deacon). Well, certainly not all of their strange behavior, but one in particular. Several times throughout the Mass, you may notice the priest mumble to himself, bow for some unknown reason, and maybe even genuflect. When this happens while he's standing at the altar, it may even look like he's looking for something behind the altar. Is there some strange vortex back there, or a stagehand feeding him lines?

Well, actually all of these strange movements have to do with one of the three roles of prayer that the priest takes during the Mass. We have talked about two of them already. Since the priest is acting as Christ (*in persona Christi capitis*) [cf. *Looking Through Stained Glass*, August 19, 2018, "Holy Orders – When Jesus Calls, We Ought to Listen and Respond"], he sometimes intercedes for us with God, just as Jesus would. For example, this happens most especially during the Eucharistic Prayer, but it also happens during the presidential prayers, such as the Opening Prayer (or Collect) and the Prayer after Communion. Since the priest also is one of the faithful, he may lead us in prayer, such as the "Our Father" or the Creed. Finally, sometimes the priest offers his own prayers to God and these are most often said *sotto voce*, or in a low voice. Knowing some of these prayers may help us to understand the Mass a little better.

The first time that a private prayer of the priest is said is just prior to the Gospel. If the priest is proclaiming the Gospel, he will say, "Cleanse my heart and my lips, almighty God, that I may worthily proclaim your holy Gospel." A similar phrase is used to bless a deacon who proclaims the Gospel. At the end of the Gospel, the priest or deacon who reads it will say, "Through the words of the Gospel may our sins be wiped away," as he kisses the book.

At the preparation of the gifts of bread and wine, the priest will pray, "Blessed are you, Lord God of all creation, for through your goodness we have received the bread [the wine] we offer you: fruit of the earth [the vine] and work of human hands, it will become for us the bread of life [our spiritual drink]." Just prior to the blessing of the wine, as the priest or deacon adds a drop of water to the wine, he will pray some of the most beautiful and meaningful words that nobody ever hears: "By the mystery of this water and wine may we come to share in the divinity of Christ, who humbled himself to share in our humanity." As the priest prepares for the ablution (washing of hands), he prays, "With humble spirit and contrite heart may we be accepted by you, O Lord, and may our sacrifice in your sight this day be pleasing to you, Lord God." As he washes his hands, he prays, "Wash me, O Lord, from my iniquity and cleanse me from my sin."

Just before Communion, while everyone is singing the "Lamb of God," the priest takes a small piece of the host and places it in the chalice, saying, "May this mingling of the Body and Blood of our Lord Jesus Christ bring eternal life to us who receive it," and then he prays silently while genuflecting, "Lord Jesus Christ, Son of the living God, who by the will of the Father and the work of the Holy Spirit, through your Death gave life to the world, free me by this, your most holy Body and Blood, from all my sins and from every evil; keep me always faithful to your commandments and never let me be parted from you." As he receives the Eucharist, he prays, "May the Body [Blood] of Christ keep me safe for eternal life." Finally, after Communion, as the priest is purifying the vessels, he prays, "What has passed our lips as food, O Lord, may we possess in purity of heart, that what has been given to us in time may be our healing for eternity."

Now that you know the "secret" prayers of the priest, hopefully they will help you understand his disposition at those moments. Next week, we will discuss the last portion of the Mass, the Concluding Rites.

