



**Step-by-Step Walk Through the Mass
Do This in Remembrance of Me, Part 43,
The Preface
by FR. LUKE SPANNAGEL**



As we continue our journey through the Eucharistic Prayer, we turn to teaching from the Diocese of Peoria: “The Eucharistic prayer is the center and summit of the entire Mass. Eucharist means thanksgiving. The Eucharistic prayer is a celebration of thanksgiving and sanctification. The Mass offers the fitting praise and worship to God as it places before his throne the sacrifice of his Son on the Cross... The Eucharistic Prayer offers gratitude to God, as it is the prayer of his Son, Jesus. Acting in the person of Christ, the priest, in the name of the community, offers this great prayer of adoration and praise to the Father through the power of the Holy Spirit” (“A Study of the Mass,” p. 13). Very clearly at the forefront, we are giving thanks to God as we are gathered around the altar. A special part of the prayers at the altar that highlights thanksgiving is called the **Preface**.

A Prayer That Unifies through the Centuries

The Preface begins with a familiar dialogue:

The Lord be with you. And with your spirit.

Lift up your hearts. We lift them up to the Lord.

Let us give thanks to the Lord our God. It is right and just.

As Edward Sri notes, “This dialogue is first reported in the Eucharistic prayer of St. Hippolytus (c. A.D. 215). Now, eighteen centuries later, we continue to say the same words, uniting us with the Christians of the early Church” (*A Biblical Walk Through the Mass*, p. 95). I enjoy sharing this stretch into history with people when I offer explanatory Masses. Just let it sink in for a moment: one of our oldest accounts of the Mass includes this dialogue. Think about all the Masses celebrated throughout history; think about that unity in prayer with all those who have gone before us! As a priest, I am always strengthened by the thought that some of those early priests who were saints and martyrs would have used these same words when offering the Mass. What an amazing reminder of the unity we share through the Mass!

The first part of this dialogue takes us back to the beginning of the Mass, when the assembly is greeted by the celebrant. As Edward Sri explains, the next part of the dialogue recalls Lamentations 3:41, “Let us lift up our hearts and hands to God in heaven.” For us, Sri says, this is a “wake-up call” where the priest “is summoning us to give our fullest attention to what is about to unfold.” Sri quotes St. Cyprian (+ A.D. 258), commenting on this part of the dialogue: “When we stand praying, beloved brethren, we ought to be watchful and earnest with our whole heart, intent on our prayers. Let all carnal and worldly thoughts pass away, nor let the soul at that time think on anything but the object of its prayer” (*A Biblical Walk Through the Mass*, p. 96–97). Very clearly, the second exchange in the dialogue helps us renew our attention to God as we enter the Eucharistic Prayer.

A Prayer of Thanksgiving

For the last section of the dialogue, Sri reminds us that giving thanks to God “is a common biblical response to God’s goodness and to his saving works in our lives” (*A Biblical Walk Through the Mass*, p. 98). As we will see more next time, the words that follow in the Preface will remind us of many different reasons to be thankful to God. Tying back to the Offertory, we can recall that we are thankful for the blessings we have in terms of our livelihood and resources. We can think of God’s care for us and all he provides for us. As Sri says so well, “We also should be thankful for the miracle about to take place in our midst, as the bread and wine on the altar will be changed into the body and blood of Jesus. Our Lord and King will soon be with us in the Real Presence of the Eucharist. Our hearts should be filled with gratitude as our church becomes like a new holy of holies, housing the divine presence. What an awesome privilege it is for us to draw near! [...] There is so much to be thankful for at this moment in the Liturgy! We therefore acknowledge that gratitude is the only fitting response to the mysteries about to unfold before us. In answer to the priest’s invitation to thank the Lord, we say, ‘It is right and just’” (*A Biblical Walk Through the Mass*, p. 99). Amen!