



Last week, we took a closer look at the opening dialogue of the **Preface**, and especially how it invites us to give thanks to God. As we said earlier, the word *Eucharist* means “thanksgiving.” Charles Belmonte indicates that the preface is an appropriate beginning of the Eucharistic prayer, since it “is basically an act of thanksgiving in a literary form between prayer and hymn. It seeks to move the faithful to praise and joy” (*Understanding the Mass*, p. 128).

### **Thanksgiving for Every Day of the Year**

For me as a priest, the Preface is one of my favorite parts of the Mass, especially when I take time to really pray through the phrases. The Preface is one of the variable parts of the Mass, where there are many options that can change from week to week. Our current Missal has about 50 regularly used Prefaces grouped together, including ones for Advent, Christmas, Lent, Easter, Sundays of Ordinary Time, Feasts of the Blessed Virgin Mary and the Saints, Funerals, and some “Common” Prefaces that can be used on days where another specific Preface isn’t called for. In addition to these, there are many more Prefaces in the Missal, including some specially designed for certain Eucharistic Prayers and those that are used on specific celebrations such as Christ the King or the Most Holy Trinity. There are even some special Prefaces for civic holidays, such as Thanksgiving or the Fourth of July in the United States. Each of these Prefaces will highlight special truths of a particular celebration or season of the year.

Following the response of the people in the Preface dialogue, “It is right and just,” I enjoy how the priest begins praying the Preface with, “It is truly right and just.” We are encouraging each other in giving thanks. These words of the priest communicate, “Yes! Let us continue giving thanks—it is right and just!” I often will pray those words with emphasis, as we transition to the next part of the Preface that will highlight special truths for us.

### **Special Truths Proclaimed in the Preface**

For example, Preface I of Advent says, “For he assumed at his first coming the lowliness of human flesh, and so fulfilled the design you formed long ago, and opened for us the way to eternal salvation, that, when he comes again in glory and majesty and all is at last made manifest, we who watch for that day may inherit the great promise in which now we dare to hope.”

As another example, in Preface I of the Most Holy Eucharist, we hear, “For he is the true and eternal Priest, who instituted the pattern of an everlasting sacrifice and was the first to offer himself as the saving Victim, commanding us to make this offering as his memorial. As we eat his flesh that was sacrificed for us, we are made strong, and, as we drink his Blood that was poured out for us, we are washed clean.”

Since they are so good, and since we are in the Eucharistic Revival, here are the key phrases from Preface II of the Most Holy Eucharist, “For at the Last Supper with his Apostles, establishing for the ages to come the saving memorial of the Cross, he offered himself to you as the unblemished Lamb, the acceptable gift of perfect praise. Nourishing your faithful by this sacred mystery, you make them holy, so that the human race, bounded by one world, may be enlightened by one faith and united by one bond of charity. And so, we approach the table of this wondrous Sacrament, so that, bathed in the sweetness of your grace, we may pass over to the heavenly realities here foreshadowed.”

No doubt, those are prayers packed with great truths! If we aren’t attentive to this part of the Mass, we could really miss out on some great highlights that help ready our hearts for the ultimate prayer of thanksgiving—the Holy Eucharist—the perfect sacrifice of Jesus offered to the Father. If you haven’t noticed the Preface in a while, I give you a challenge for the next time you are at Mass: see if you can notice any of the main themes of the Preface. It is a great summary of the celebration of the day, and a fitting preparation for the rest of the Eucharistic Prayer to come!