



NATIONAL
**Eucharistic
Revival**

**Step-by-Step Walk Through the Mass
Do This in Remembrance of Me, Part 47,
The Background of the Eucharistic Prayers**
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What is the background for the Eucharistic Prayers? We begin with what Jesus himself said and did. Fr. Guy Oury writes, “According to St. Paul and Saint Luke, Jesus ‘gave thanks’ (1 Cor. 11:24; Lk 22:17). According to Saint Matthew and Saint Mark, he ‘said [a] blessing’ (Mt. 26:26; Mk 14:22). The two expressions are equivalent. They designate a blessing prayer of thanksgiving that was customary among the Jews. The ritual of the Passover meal, which may have been the setting for the institution and first celebration of the Eucharist, included such a prayer” (The Mass, p. 92–93). If we look through the Gospels, we will see Jesus often giving thanks. This reminds us of the word Eucharist, which means thanksgiving!

The Jewish Roots of Eucharistic Prayers

As Edward Sri observes, “Scholars have noted that the Eucharistic prayer has roots in the Jewish table prayers recited at every meal. Near the start of the meal, the father of the family or the one presiding over the community would take bread and speak a blessing (barakah) which praised God, saying: ‘Blessed are you, Lord, our God, king of the universe, who has brought forth bread from heaven.’ The bread was then broken and given to the participants, and the people began eating... When the meal neared its conclusion, the presider prayed a second and longer barakah over a cup of wine. This blessing had three parts: 1) praise of God for his creation; 2) thanksgiving for his redemptive work in the past (for example, the giving of the covenant, the land, the law); and 3) supplication for the future, that God’s saving works would continue in their lives and be brought to their climax in the sending of the Messiah who would restore the Davidic kingdom” (A Biblical Walk Through the Mass, p. 93). Doesn’t that structure and content sound familiar? Sri goes on to say that this pattern was found in early Eucharistic prayers and is still present today. We also see this pattern in the writings of St. Justin and St. Hippolytus.

The Promises to the Jews Fulfilled in Jesus

It makes sense that Jesus prayed in the pattern of the Jewish people of his day. What was different, and what changes these prayers for us, is when Jesus said, “This is My Body. This is My Blood.” As Fr. Oury continues, “In his blessing prayers, and especially the one he spoke on the eve of the Passion for the institution of the Eucharist, Jesus went beyond the blessing prayers of his contemporaries. He referred to more than the benefits of creation or the blessings of the history of salvation in the Old Testament. He showed the promises fulfilled in himself... At the Last Supper Jesus left his disciples a memorial of his covenant. He left them certain actions to be perpetuated: breaking and distribution of bread, presentation of the cup, together with the words of institution” (The Mass, p. 94).

Knowing more about the Jewish background can be a great help to us in understanding customs and references we find in the Scriptures as well as seeing how many prayers of the Mass took shape. Above all, this background can help us understand even more clearly the longing for the Messiah and the amazing gift that Jesus is as he is truly present with us! As we continue our journey through the parts of the Mass, the notes of thanksgiving and praise will continue to be present, as well as ongoing reminders of how Jesus is truly present with us and why the Mass is such a unique and perfect prayer of praise to the Father. Challenge for the week: See how many times you notice “thanks” present in the Mass!