



As we continue our final preparation for receiving Communion, we may notice another time when it looks as if the priest may be talking to himself at the altar. Actually, he is praying! After the “Lamb of God,” the congregation kneels down in adoration of THE Lamb of God present on the altar—Jesus Christ really, truly, and substantially present. Meanwhile, the priest joins his hands, perhaps bowing slightly, speaks quietly to himself, genuflects, and then gets ready for the next part of the Mass. What is he doing?

This part of the Mass is called the **private preparation of the priest** for receiving Holy Communion. As is often the case, the name of this part of the Mass tells you exactly what is happening! Before Communion, the priest takes a few moments to prepare to receive Our Lord. According to the Diocese of Peoria, after the fraction rite, “the priest prays a prayer quietly to himself. This is done quietly because it is a personal prayer of the priest as he prepares for communion. The sacrament of the Eucharist is the only Sacrament a priest can administer to himself. This private prayer asks the Lord to forgive any faults and to keep him faithful to the teachings of the Church... After this private preparation, the priest genuflects in adoration” (*A Study of the Mass*, p. 19).

The Two Prayers of Preparation

The *Roman Missal* actually gives the priest two options for this private prayer, both equally beautiful and prayerful:

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.

Or

May the receiving of your Body and Blood, Lord Jesus Christ, not bring me to judgment and condemnation, but through your loving mercy be for me protection in mind and body and a healing remedy.

Fr. Guy Oury observes that “the first of the two prayers begins the reminiscence of Peter’s confession at Caesarea Philippi and alludes to the Passion, which Christ foretold shortly after. The Eucharist is offered to us as an antidote to sin. It is, by Christ’s own will, the favored means of union with him” (*The Mass*, p. 116). The second prayer, while shorter, also reminds the priest just how much he needs our Lord in the Eucharist and calls him to strive to be a worthy and holy priest.

A Personal Moment of Prayer for the Priest

For me as a priest, taking time for these prayers is one of my favorite parts of the Mass. During much of the Mass, as we have been reviewing, there are many things for the priest to do and say. I am often aware that I am praying on behalf of the people who are present. I certainly give myself the challenge of helping people understand the gift before us and pray together better. For me, this moment is a short break where I am just praying to Jesus from my heart. Each of the prayers is truly meaningful. The first reminds me of a priest who was really influential when I was growing up. Sometimes, as an altar server, I could hear him pray these words; I was struck by his prayer asking God to help him stay faithful and never to be parted from our Lord. It sounded so humble but also confident: Lord, this is what I need, and I know You will do it. That same confidence is in the second prayer as I ask for protection and healing. The word *remedy* fills my heart with hope that this union with Jesus will truly bring my heart into deeper union with him... and help keep me there!

So, what should everyone else do while the priest is praying one of the above prayers? While it is just a brief moment, Charles Belmonte reminds us: “The personal preparation of the priest gives us the opportunity to prepare ourselves also in silence, without the noise of words but with an abundance of acts of love. We feel unworthy as the moment for receiving our Lord approaches. But we decide to go on because we know that he wants to remain in the consecrated species to be our nourishment and the cure for our weaknesses” (*Understanding the Mass*, p. 182). In a way similar to the priest’s preparation, this is a wonderful moment to ask Jesus to strengthen you in faithfulness and purity through the gift of Holy Communion. Let us prepare fervently at this part of the Mass, for the Lord is coming to us very soon in his Flesh and Blood, the Most Holy Eucharist!