



In the Episcopal Church's Book of Common Prayer (1979) there are eight different Eucharistic Prayers. The Roman Catholic Church's western rite has four Eucharistic Prayers, with several additional ones authorized for special occasions. The Eastern Orthodox Church has two Eucharistic Prayers. What are the elements which make up a Eucharistic Prayer which all these different Eucharistic Prayers have in common?

All branches of the historic Catholic Church—Roman, Eastern Orthodox, Anglican, Old Catholic, and Oriental—have always taught that when the Sacrament of the Eucharist is celebrated by a Priest validly ordained in the Apostolic Succession:

- the bread and wine become the actual body and blood of Christ: His true, living presence in the fullness of His being: body and blood, soul and divinity
- Christ's sacrifice on Calvary is made present; and the fullness of His life, His atoning work on the Cross, and His resurrection—and all their benefits—are made present and available in the Sacrament

The Eastern Orthodox have described the Eucharist as an "icon," a window which breaks through the barriers of time and the barriers of space...a window at which we can stand and have direct contact with all of history and all of the Church in Paradise and in Heaven.

The Eucharistic Prayer is the place in the liturgy where the Priest, in the person of Christ, brings the Sacrament into being and offers the redemptive sacrifice of Christ.

The Rev. Marion J. Hatchett, Th.D. in his landmark *Commentary on the American Prayer Book* identifies nine elements common to historic Catholic Eucharistic Prayers (pp. 361ff):

- **Opening Dialogue** (*Sursum corda*... "Lift up your hearts"): a dialogue which has its roots in the Jewish blessings and probably goes back to the Apostles
- **Praise and Thanksgiving**: an expression of praise to God for His mighty acts of creation which also comes from the Jewish blessings
- **Sanctus** ("Holy, holy, holy Lord"): a hymn which comes from the song of the seraphim in Isaiah's account of his vision of the Lord (Isaiah 6.1-3)
- **Institution Narrative**: the New Testament account of Jesus' institution of the Eucharist at the Last Supper
- **Anamnesis** ["making actually present again"]: prayer re-presenting Christ's life, death, and resurrection

- **Oblation:** prayer offering this sacrifice (the sacrifice of Christ on Calvary made present again) to God
- **Epiclesis:** prayer calling down the Holy Spirit upon the bread and wine that they may be made the body and blood of Christ
- **Supplications:** prayers for various benefits of the Holy Spirit
- **Doxology:** hymn of praise to the Holy Trinity which concludes the Eucharistic Prayer

The order of these elements has varied through the centuries from Eucharistic Prayer to Eucharistic Prayer, as has the extent of the development of each element. For example, the Epiclesis has generally preceded the Institution Narrative in the Western Eucharistic Prayers and followed the Institution Narrative in the Eastern Eucharistic Prayers.

In the Eastern Eucharistic Prayers the Praise and Thanksgiving generally preceded the *Sanctus*. Preceding the *Sanctus* in the Western Eucharistic Prayers, however, there was generally a variable “Proper Preface” which focused on the commemoration of the day or season; and the Praise and Thanksgiving came between the *Sanctus* and the Institution Narrative.

In some Eucharistic Prayers (e.g. the Roman Canon) the Supplications developed into extensive intercessions. In other Eucharistic Prayers the Epiclesis became highly developed.

In the late Middle Ages a concern developed about “the moment of consecration.” The Roman Church traditionally said that this was at the Priest’s recitation of the Words of Institution (“This is my body. This is my blood.”). The Eastern Orthodox Church traditionally said that it was at the Epiclesis (“Send your Holy Spirit upon this bread and this wine that they may be made the body and blood of Christ.”)

Anglicans have traditionally said that in order to have a valid consecration there must be both the Words of Institution and an Epiclesis but have never officially defined a “moment of consecration.”