

Formation for Eucharist: Eucharistic Prayer for Reconciliation

When Eucharistic Prayers II, III and IV of the Roman Rite debuted in 1970, they were so warmly received that many Catholics started asking for more. Some theologians started composing new prayers for study purposes, and some priests were illicitly using them. In April 1973 the Sacred Congregation for Divine Worship published the Circular Letter *Eucharistiae participationem*, which said that this had to stop. There would be no new eucharistic prayers. Four were enough.

Nineteen months later the Congregation changed its mind in response to continued requests from conferences of bishops. In November 1974 its members issued their decree *Postquam de Precibus*, approving for experimentation two eucharistic prayers on the theme of reconciliation and three for masses with children. Conferences of bishops who requested these prayers received permission to use them for three years, and they had to choose only one prayer from each category. Because they were still experimental, the prayers had to be published separately – not with the others in the Sacramentary.

The response to the new prayers was so positive that the Congregation extended permission to use them for another three years. In 1983 the Latin editions were published, and many restrictions were removed. All the prayers could be used by all the conferences, and they could be published in an appendix to the translations of the Roman Missal. All five of the new prayers appeared in the English language Sacramentary of 1985.

Interest in the theme of reconciliation had peaked because 1975 and 1983 were Holy Years, during which pilgrims were encouraged to visit Rome or make observances at home, partly to encounter the mysteries of penance, forgiveness and grace. The eucharistic prayers for reconciliation were intended to enrich the celebrations of the 1975 Holy Year. They pair well with several of the masses for various needs and occasions in the back of the Roman Missal, such as the ones to foster harmony, for reconciliation, for maintaining peace and justice, in time of war or civil disturbance, and for the promotion of charity. They work with certain votive masses such as those of the Holy Cross and the Most Holy Eucharist. They are also fitting throughout the season of Lent.

It has always been permissible to replace the preface of the eucharistic prayers for reconciliation. For example, during Lent the priest may begin with the seasonal preface, and take up the rest of a eucharistic prayer for reconciliation after the Sanctus. This has been especially appropriate with the first of these prayers, which comes with a preface saying, “Now is. . . a time of grace and reconciliation.” That made sense during the 1975 Holy Year

and continues to describe each Lent, but it is not so fitting on the other occasions when this prayer is offered.

Introducing these prayers in 1974, the Sacred Congregation for Divine Worship wrote, “The translation of the text may be made with a degree of freedom in order that it correspond fully to the requirements and idiom of the respective language.” The translation rules of 2001, though, have changed that philosophy. Although the new rules are controversial, they bring some benefits. For example, as with the other eucharistic prayers, the revised words will more strongly bring out some of the scriptural allusions. As an example, this article will treat the first of the eucharistic prayers for reconciliation.

Some scriptural allusions have always been clear in the first translation. The preface says that God calls us to a more abundant life (John 10:10). The love and mercy of God makes one think of several passages in the Book of Psalms (86:15, 103:8, 111:4, and 145:8). The time of grace and reconciliation alludes to Luke 4:19 and the passage it quotes, Isaiah 61:2.

After the Sanctus, we pray to be holy as God is holy (Leviticus 11:44-45). The arms of Jesus, stretched out between heaven and earth, are called a sign of the covenant, the same description for the rainbow in the sky that God bestows after the flood in Genesis 9:9-17. We have heard that Jesus made peace through the blood of his cross (Colossians 1:20). The lines after the memorial acclamation call Christ our Passover (1 Corinthians 5:7) and our peace (Ephesians 2:14). All these biblical allusions have been clear.

With the revised translation we will hear a few more that have always been there in the Latin edition. The preface calls God rich in mercy (Ephesians 2:4) and states that Christ offers us a new bond of love (Colossians 3:14). Just before the institution narrative, we will hear that Christ gave himself up to death for our sake, not refusing the cross – an allusion to Philippians 2:6-8. The same passage calls Christ the Just One, a title Peter gives him in Acts of the Apostles 3:14.

We have been hearing that Jesus wanted to celebrate “the Paschal feast”, but the revised translation says more clearly that he desired to celebrate “the Passover” (Luke 22:15). The priest has been saying that Jesus took the cup filled with wine, but the revised translation says that it was filled with “the fruit of the vine,” an allusion to Mark 14:25 and its parallels in Matthew 26:29 and Luke 22:18. Finally, in the concluding petitions, we have heard the priest pray for those who “share in the one sacrifice of Christ,” but the revised translation will speak more expressively of those who “share this one Bread and one Cup,” that “they may be gathered in Christ into one body” (1 Corinthians 10:17).

Apart from the scriptures, there are two other noteworthy references. The section after the memorial acclamation will now begin with the word “Remembering.” This is a direct quote of the opening word in the same section of Eucharistic Prayer I. Also, the prayer

concludes with a vision of the day when we will be “freed from the wound of corruption.” This image of eternal life can be found in the hymn at vespers for the Common of Virgins, *Iesu corona virginum*, a text traditionally ascribed to Saint Ambrose.

Not to be missed are the multiple references to reconciliation and peace. These themes are clear in the first translation, and they will still give this eucharistic prayer its feel. The prayer focuses on the need of the whole community for reconciliation, not just the sin of individuals: The preface speaks of the human family, the epiclesis calls us God’s sons and daughters, and the closing petitions ask that all division be taken away. Whereas Eucharistic Prayer IV says that God offered us covenants time and again, the first prayer for reconciliation says that we broke the covenants time and again. We pray for communion of mind and heart with the pope and the bishop. All these themes still profitably call for meditation, catechesis and proclamation.

The first eucharistic prayer for reconciliation has always appealed to worshipers for its sincerity of tone, its modest spirit, its confident vision, and its assurance of grace. Its many biblical sources, newly evident from a polished translation, should give it even more strength.

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