

Lift Up Your Hearts

We continue with our series on the Mass, the Church's great prayer and the principle means of our sanctification. We have discussed the Introductory Rite, the Liturgy of the Word, the Preparation of the Altar, and now it's time to "Lift up our hearts" as we get a peek into heaven itself with the beginning of the Eucharistic Prayer.

The Eucharistic Prayer opens with a three-part dialogue between the priest and the faithful. The priest greets the faithful by saying, "*The Lord be with you.*" And the faithful respond, "*And with your spirit.*" This reminds us of the initial greeting at Mass.

Then the priest says, "*Lift up your hearts.*" In the Latin, it is *Sursum corda*. We used to have a professor in the seminary with a good sense of humor who said, "*Sursum corda* buckaroo." In other words, have courage! The faithful are invited to lift up their hearts to heaven, where the angels and saints constantly worship God. We are invited to "*seek what is above, where Christ is seated at the right hand of God*" (Col. 3:1). Hence, the faithful respond, "*We lift them up the Lord.*"

Next, the priest says, "*Let us give thanks to the Lord our God.*" Psalm 136:1 reminds us, "O give thanks to the Lord, for he is good." St. Paul, for his part, reminds us to give thanks to God in all we do (Col. 3:17). Thus, the people respond, "*It is right and just.*" God is good and therefore it is "right and just" that we give Him thanks.

After the short dialogue, the priest begins the Preface prayer. In the preface, the priest gives thanks to God on behalf of the people, glorifying Him for the whole work of salvation or for some particular aspect of it (depending on the day, festival, or time of the year). For example, the Preface prayer for the Solemnity of All Saints, which we will celebrate on November 1, gives thanks God for the "great array of brothers and sisters" who give God eternal praise in the heavenly Jerusalem.

Once the Preface prayer concludes, the whole congregation says or sings the *Sanctus* ("Holy, Holy, Holy Lord"). This is a very biblical prayer of praise. In the book of Isaiah, the prophet received a vision of the heavenly King in the divine throne room in all His majesty. Isaiah then sees six-winged angelic *seraphim* (meaning "burning ones") flying above the Lord. They call to one another in an ecstatic

hymn of praise: "*Holy, holy, holy is the Lord of hosts; the whole earth is full of his glory.*" (Is. 6:3) The Seraphim proclaim that God is the most holy or the "all-holy One."

The *Sanctus* is also rooted in the Book of Revelation. At the beginning of this book, John is caught up into heaven where he is given a vision of the heavenly liturgy (Rev. 1:10). In this vision, like the prophet Isaiah, he sees six-winged angelic creatures before the throne of God singing a familiar hymn of praise: "*Holy, holy, holy, is the Lord God Almighty, who was and is and is to come!*" (Rev. 4:8) That said, in singing the *Sanctus* we join our voices to the angels and saints in heaven! Like them, we prepare to encounter the all-holy One. When I learned this it certainly changed the way I participated in Mass.

In the second half of the *Sanctus*, we sing, "*Hosanna in the highest. Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord. Hosanna in the highest.*" "Hosanna" comes from the Hebrew meaning "Save us." It is rooted in Psalm 118, a pilgrimage hymn that was sung on the way to the Temple for major feasts. In the Mass, we are not heading toward the Temple in Jerusalem, but rather the new Temple, Jesus Christ present in the Eucharist.

Additionally, it is helpful to remember that the crowds repeated these words as Jesus was entering Jerusalem in what we now celebrate as Palm Sunday. They welcome Jesus by laying their cloaks before Him (sign of royalty) and wave palm branches (sign of victory). Like them, we are about to welcome Jesus not just onto the altars in our parishes, but also into our *hearts* in the Eucharist. In today's language, we might say, "Yes, Jesus! Save me! I open my heart to you and welcome you with joy into my heart in the Eucharist!"

At the conclusion of the *Sanctus*, the congregation kneels before the priest begins one of the Eucharistic Prayers. The posture of kneeling symbolizes reverence and worship. In St. Paul's letter to the Philippians, he reminds us "*that at the name of Jesus, every knee should bend of those in heaven and on earth and under the earth*" (2:10). There is a long standing joke that the "devil has no knees" because he refuses to worship God. We, on the other hand, gladly bend our knees before the Lord as we worship Him.

Next week we will look the parts of one of the Eucharistic Prayers to better understand and enter into this great prayer of the Church.

Lift Up Your Paw



We lift it up to the Lord!