

Varying the Eucharistic Prayers Enriches Liturgy and Assembly

Richard E. McCarron

Last Advent, a member of the liturgical assembly remarked on the beauty of the prayer the presider had prayed. She cited images that had stayed with her from the Eucharistic Prayer for Reconciliation I, and asked, “How come I haven’t heard that before?” Her surprise highlights how presiders often rely, week after week, on one or two of the Eucharistic Prayers, usually from Eucharistic Prayers I–IV.

The number of Eucharistic Prayers has increased during the last half century, but since many priest celebrants only pray from a select few, liturgical assemblies often have missed the richness of these prayers. The publication of Eucharistic Prayers II–IV alongside the Roman Canon (Eucharistic Prayer I) after the Second Vatican Council sparked interest on the part of bishops’ conferences around the world to propose new Eucharistic Prayers for their particular pastoral settings or for important occasions. This was also supported by the explanation of the new anaphoras in the guidelines for catechesis issued in 1968: “one anaphora cannot contain all the pastoral, spiritual, and theological richness to be hope for.” With a variety of Eucharistic Prayers, “the Church’s intent here, too, has been to enrich the Roman liturgy pastorally, spiritually, and liturgically.”²¹

Eucharistic Prayers I–IV are located in the Order of Mass itself. Since their promulgation in the *Missale Romanum* in 1970, they were given equal standing with the Roman Canon, which had been the single Eucharistic Prayer of the Roman Rite. Particular importance is accorded to the Preface of the Eucharistic Prayer (which is not the introduction to the Eucharistic Prayer but an integral element of it; see the *General Instruction of the Roman Missal* [GIRM], 79). As the GIRM explains, “The numerous Prefaces with which the *Roman Missal* is endowed have as their purpose to bring out more fully the motives for thanksgiving within the Eucharistic Prayer and to set out more clearly the different facets of the mystery of salvation” (364). Eucharistic Prayer IV is unique among the three in that the Preface of this prayer must always be used and not changed out with another Preface (see GIRM, 365d).

In the *Missale Romanum* (2002/2007), other Eucharistic Prayers that were approved after 1970 have been included in the appendix to the Order of Mass. Also, the Eucharistic Prayers for Masses with Children were published in a separate booklet. In pastoral planning for Sunday celebrations, the variety of the prayers is sometimes neglected. The GIRM offers guidance in the choice of Mass and its texts:



The story of salvation in the Eucharistic Prayers for Reconciliation is shown through the motif of reconciliation connected to God’s covenantal love.

Photo © John Zich

The pastoral effectiveness of a celebration will be greatly increased if the texts of the readings, the prayers, and the liturgical chants correspond as aptly as possible to the needs, the preparation, and the culture of the participants. This will be achieved by appropriate use of the many possibilities of choice described below.

Hence in arranging the celebration of Mass, the Priest should be attentive rather to the common spiritual good of the People of God than to his own inclinations. He should also remember that choices of this kind are to be made in harmony with those who exercise some part in the celebration, including the faithful, as regards the parts that more directly pertain to them. (352)

This essay explores the Eucharistic Prayers in the appendix to the Order of Mass in *The Roman Missal* as well as the Eucharistic Prayers for Masses with Children. After a brief consideration of the background of each prayer or set of prayers, a deeper consideration of the various meanings of the texts will be provided as well as suggestions for pastoral use of the Eucharistic Prayers in the appendix.

EUCCHARISTIC PRAYERS FOR RECONCILIATION

The first grouping of prayers in the appendix to the Order of Mass consists of the Eucharistic Prayers for Reconciliation. These prayers have their origin with the Holy Year for Reconciliation convoked by Paul VI for 1975. From that occasion, they were given and extended experimental use in 1977. They first appeared in the United States in booklet form and then were included in appendix VI in the *Sacramentary* (1985).²

Understanding the Prayers

A key to understanding the Eucharistic Prayers for Reconciliation is within the narrative of all of the Eucharistic Prayers of *The Roman Missal*. Each Eucharistic Prayer unfolds the story of salvation in a different way. The major section of the prayer is a memorial thanksgiving of God's saving work, which culminates in the passion, death, Resurrection, sending of the Spirit, and future coming of Christ—in short, the Paschal Mystery. The Paschal Mystery is summed up in the Institution Narrative and the memorial offering that follows. The next major part of the prayer is intercessory, which is given particular expression in an invocation of the Holy Spirit and intercession for ecclesial and eschatological transformation of humankind. In the Eucharistic Prayers for Reconciliation, we have what Old Testament scholar Walter Brueggemann has termed a “prophetic energizing and emergence of amazement” through remembrance.³

The story of salvation in the Eucharistic Prayers for Reconciliation is plotted in a particular way—namely, through the motif of reconciliation connected to God's covenantal love. In Eucharistic Prayer for Reconciliation I, the thread that links the memorial thanksgiving and the invocation is God's promise to act with steadfast love and mercy toward those who keep the covenant (see Exodus 34:6–7): “Indeed, though we once were lost / and could not approach you, / you loved us with the greatest love: / for your Son, who alone is just, / handed himself over to death, / and did not disdain to be nailed for our sake / to the wood of the Cross.”

The prayer speaks to the summons to conversion (see the memorial thanksgiving of the prayer in Nehemiah 9). The vision of the unity of the People of God, of the Body of Christ, leads to a petition for a new creation as the prayer culminates in the doxology: “Help us to work together / for the coming of your Kingdom, / until the hour when we stand before you, / Saints among the Saints in the halls of heaven . . . / Then, freed at last from the wound of corruption / and made fully into a new creation, / we shall sing to you with gladness.”

In Eucharistic Prayer for Reconciliation II, the story of salvation begins with an evocation of discord: “For though the human race / is divided by dissension and discord . . .” It then



Photo © John Zich

Attentive to the common spiritual good of the People of God, the priest celebrant and the liturgy team select the suitable prayers as they seek to read the signs of the times.

plots the memorial thanksgiving with the threads of love, forgiveness, and respect: “By the working of your power / it comes about, O Lord, / that hatred is overcome by love, / revenge gives way to forgiveness, / and discord is changed to mutual respect.” The divine love that grounds forgiveness and reconciliation provides a particular lens through which the Paschal Mystery is recalled. The invocation then evokes the amazement of the eternal banquet, “the unending banquet of unity / in a new heaven and a new earth, / where the fullness of your peace will shine forth.”

Use of the Prayers

The Eucharistic Prayers for Reconciliation may be used in Masses “in which the mystery of reconciliation is conveyed to the faithful in a special way.” For Eucharistic Prayer for Reconciliation I, the rubric notes the following Masses:

- For Promoting Harmony
- For Reconciliation
- For the Preservation of Peace and Justice
- In Time of War or Civil Disturbance
- For the Forgiveness of Sins
- For Charity
- Of the Mystery of the Holy Cross
- Of the Most Holy Eucharist
- Of the Most Precious Blood of our Lord Jesus Christ

At the end of those suggestions, it adds Masses during Lent.



Photo © John Zich

With its unfolding narrative of Jesus' mission of proclaiming the Reign of God, the Eucharistic Prayer for Various Needs is especially appropriate during Ordinary Time.

Noteworthy is the section of the rubric that explains, "Although these Eucharistic Prayers have been provided with a proper Preface, they may also be used with other Prefaces that refer to penance and conversion, as, for example, the Prefaces of Lent." One can see the themes of the Eucharistic Prayers for Reconciliation echoed in the First Preface for Advent. Possibilities also can be seen for using the Eucharistic Prayers for Reconciliation with the Prefaces during the Sundays and weekdays in Ordinary Time. The particular nature of the memorial thanksgiving prayed in Preface II of Advent, the Prefaces for Christmas, and for Easter, would preclude the use of a Eucharistic Prayers for Reconciliation at those times.

The motivations are many to pray these prayers in a Church and a world that are desperately in need of both remembering God's steadfast love and mercy and hoping for a new creation. Among the litany of reasons are: strife, violence, discord, distrust, abuse, devaluation of human dignity, injustice, racism, and disregard of human rights. The Eucharistic Prayers for Reconciliation can be the way to offer both a prophetic energizing and a hope that the reign of God's justice, mercy, and peace can break through these bleak times. The priest celebrant and the liturgy team are called to read the signs of the times as they prepare the liturgy.

EUCCHARISTIC PRAYER FOR USE IN MASSES FOR VARIOUS NEEDS

The Eucharistic Prayer for Use in Masses for Various Needs has its origins with the Synod of Bishops held in Switzerland from 1972–1975. The bishops brought a prayer, with a rather unique structure, to the Congregation for Divine Worship for their approval. After curial debate, it was given permission for use in Switzerland in 1974, with three versions: French, German, and Italian (the original languages of the prayer). Approval for its use

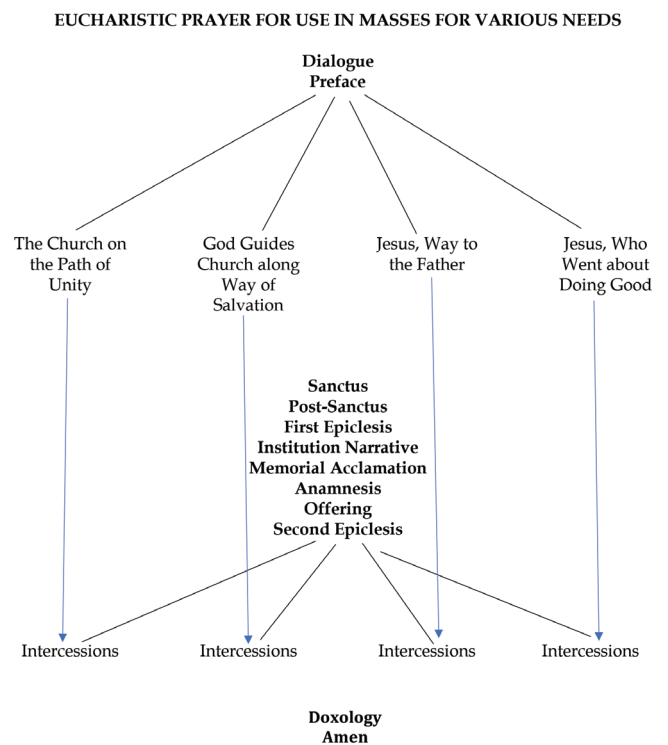
to other regions spread quickly, with its being used in twelve languages in twenty-eight countries by 1987. With such variety and no original Latin text, Rome decided to prepare an official Latin edition (*editio typica*), published in 1991. The US English translation received the approval of Rome in 1995. The prayer had already been in the *Misal Romano* as Eucharistic Prayer V since 1989.⁴

Understanding the Prayer

While reconciliation provides the narrative key to understanding the Eucharistic Prayer for Reconciliation, the Eucharistic Prayer for Use in Masses for Various Needs plots the story of salvation history with the motif of journey. Given that the prayer originated in the Swiss Synod, the stress on unity, of following Christ, and of being on the way are highly understandable.⁵ Likewise, the nature of the Church is described as "pilgrim" in this Eucharistic Prayer just as it is in the documents of the

Second Vatican Council, particularly in the Dogmatic Constitution on the Church (*Lumen gentium*).⁶

The structure of this prayer and its layout for liturgical celebration in the Missal can be confusing. There is only one Eucharistic Prayer for Various Needs, not four as the layout and headings in the Missal may first seem to indicate.⁷ Unique to this prayer is that four variable prefates are provided that are each tied to a corresponding section of intercession. Linking the Preface and the intercessions is a particular controlling theme:



- The Church on the Path to Unity,
- God Guides His Church along the Way to Salvation,
- Jesus, the Way to the Father, and
- Jesus, Who Went About Doing Good.

While the Preface and the intercessions are variable, the core elements of the dialogue, Sanctus, post-Sanctus, Institution Narrative, anamnesis/offering, and second epiclesis remain the same as a stable core of the prayer. The layout in the Missal presents the variants in distinct numbered sections (1, 2, 3, and 4), making the prayer easier to proclaim without the need to pages back and forth. The table on page 6 illustrates this design.

The narratives of the prayer in its variations draw the assembly in with their wonderful weaving of biblical images, conciliar themes, and contemporary concerns. Whereas Eucharistic Prayers I, II, and IV are firmly based in ancient prayers, and Eucharistic Prayer III is another expression of Eucharistic Prayer I, the Eucharistic Prayer for Various Needs, like the Eucharistic Prayers for Reconciliation, is a newer composition born of a very different context.

Use of the Prayer

Each of the variations of the Eucharistic Prayer for Various Needs is provided with some suggestions for connection with the various needs Mass formularies.⁸

The Church on the Path to Unity

- For the Church
- For the Pope
- For the Bishop
- For the Election of a Pope or a Bishop
- For a Council or Synod
- For Priests
- For the Priest Himself
- For Ministers of the Church
- For a Spiritual or Pastoral Gathering

God Guides His Church along the Way of Salvation

- For the Church
- For Vocations to Holy Orders
- For the Laity
- For the Family
- For Religious
- For Vocations to Religious Life
- For Charity
- For Relatives and Friends
- For Giving Thanks to God

Jesus, the Way to the Father

- For the Evangelization of Peoples
- For Persecuted Christians
- For the Nation or State
- For Those in Public Office
- For a Governing Assembly
- At the Beginning of the Civil Year
- For the Progress of Peoples

Jesus, Who Went About Doing Good

- For Refugees and Exiles, In Time of Famine or Those Suffering Hunger
- For Oppressors
- For Those Held in Captivity
- For Those in Prison
- For the Sick
- For the Dying
- For the Grace of a Happy Death

Are there possibilities other than these Masses to use the Eucharistic Prayer for Various Needs? Because of the unique literary structure of the prayer and the inseparable relationship of the Preface to the intercessory section, this prayer cannot be used with a seasonal Preface. Ordinary Time may offer more flexibility. With the unfolding narrative of Jesus' mission and ministry proclaiming the Reign of God—a journey of meeting Jesus and walking with him—there may be Sundays in Ordinary Time where this prayer in one of its variations may help enrich the Sunday celebration. The Lectionary readings for that Sunday, as well as the life of the parish, should offer inspiration.

EUCCHARISTIC PRAYERS FOR MASSES WITH CHILDREN

Unlike the previous Eucharistic Prayers we have considered, the Eucharistic Prayers for Masses with Children have their origin in the *Directory for Masses with Children* (1973), rather than a particular event in the life of the Church.⁹ The Congregation for Divine Worship received many local requests and texts for Eucharistic Prayers for Masses with Children and decided to prepare models for the whole Church. They drew on three existing vernacular texts, from which they prepared the Latin *editio typica*.¹⁰ After a lengthy review process, they were published in 1974 with permission for experimental use until 1977. This was eventually extended. First appearing in booklet form, the Eucharistic Prayers for Masses with Children were formally published in the *Sacramentary* (1985) as an appendix.¹¹

When *The Roman Missal* (2010) was promulgated in the United States, many noted that, while the Eucharistic Prayer for Various Needs was now included with the Eucharistic Prayers for Reconciliation, the Eucharistic Prayers for Masses with Children were not included in the third *editio typica* of *The*



Photo © John Zich

The Eucharistic Prayers for Masses with Children encourage the full, conscious, and active participation of children.

Roman Missal. This led to rumors that they had been suppressed. This is not the case at all. The Eucharistic Prayers for Masses with Children were never intended to be used in Latin, so there was no need to publish them in the official *Missale Romanum*, the *editio typica tertia, emmendata* (2007). Under the translation norms of *Liturgiam authenticam*, strong restrictions were placed on the inclusion of texts not in the *editio typica*. The US bishops decided that they would publish a separate booklet with the Eucharistic Prayers for Masses with Children and an introduction to them.¹² Wide latitude on translation and cultural and generational adaptations were permitted with the 1975 translation. The newly published edition retained the main text from 1975, while the Preface Dialogue, the Sanctus, the Institution Narrative, and the Doxology conform to the texts of the 2010 translation of the Missal.

Understanding the Prayers

The Introduction to the Eucharistic Prayers for Masses with Children and the foundational *Directory for Masses with Children* (DMC) provide a framework for understanding the logic and narrative of the three prayers. Three priorities run through both texts:

- Fostering children’s full, conscious, active participation as children (Introduction, 1; see also the principles that run through the *Directory for Masses with Children*)
- Attending fully to cultural differences and pastoral, pedagogical, and liturgical needs (Introduction, 8 and 9)
- Making use of the distinctive literary styles of each prayer (Introduction, 15)
- Fostering internal participation through integration of catechesis (Introduction, 20 and 21)

In the Eucharistic Prayers for Masses with Children, then, the memorial thanksgiving and invocation are refracted by the particularity of the assembly: children whose experience of God

is developing, as defined by the *Directory for Masses with Children*, as revolving around preadolescence (see DMC, 6). While the *Directory for Masses with Children* specifies “not yet entered into preadolescence,” this is not a clear-cut phase in many child developmental patterns. Most today would see these intervals along a spectrum, so ages cannot be pinpointed to the established categories.

This fluidity and growing understanding in child development was accentuated in the presentation in the *Sacramentary* (1985), appendix VI. There, the inclusion of the three Eucharistic Prayers for Masses with Children came from a careful attention to the religious development of children. The Introduction speaks of choosing from among the three options:

- Greater Simplicity (Prayer 1)
- Greater Participation (Prayer 2)
- Importance of Variation (Prayer 3)

The US texts offer a movement from simplicity to more complexity that recognizes the gradual nature of the children’s “external” and “internal” participation according to their religious development. Likewise, the aim of fostering the children’s movement to the full parish Eucharist (a concern expressed by the *Directory for Masses with Children*) stands out.

These concerns are reflected in the style of the three prayers. In Eucharistic Prayer for Masses with Children I, the memorial thanksgiving takes the shape of an extended Preface that is punctuated with the Sanctus broken into two segments before the whole Sanctus is sung. A feature of all three prayers is the placement of the Memorial Acclamation after the anamnesis/offering rather than immediately after the Institution Narrative. The rationale offered is “so that the children may clearly understand the connection between the words of the Lord, ‘Do this in memory of me,’ and the memorial pronounced by the Priest.” Thus “the acclamation, whether a memorial acclamation or one of praise, is not made until after the memorial (*anamnesis*) has been spoken” (19). Another feature is that the language is more concrete and simplified without being childish (see the DMC). The intercessions also express concerns appropriate to children’s religious development and gradually expanding worldview.

The Eucharistic Prayer for Masses with Children II makes use of acclamations to punctuate the prayer (recall the guiding principle about fostering participation). It introduces slightly more complex language (disciples, pope, bishops, Virgin Mary etc.). The Eucharistic Prayer for Masses with Children III is intended to provide a model for inclusion of seasonal sections by bishops’ conferences, using Easter Time to show how that might be done. To date, only the option for Easter has been provided.

Use of the Prayer

The foreword to appendix VI of the *Sacramentary* (1985) states that the “use of the eucharistic prayers for Masses with children is restricted to Masses which are celebrated for children only or at Masses at which the majority of the participants are children.” Citing the *Directory for Masses with Children*, the foreword explains that “an assembly of children . . . is one consisting of

children who have not yet reached the age of preadolescence” (see DMC, 6; it only speaks specifically about presidential texts in chapter 3, “Masses with Children in Which only a Few Adults Participate”). The edition published by the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops in 2011 states, “The use of these prayers is strictly limited to Masses celebrated with children” (14).

At a risk of simplifying child developmental periods, “childhood” can cover infancy to adolescence. Many identify a “primary school age” that precedes or can coincide with preadolescence. So, the prayers seem best suited to parish school Masses and liturgies such as those in which the church is filled with children who will receive First Communion. Some have suggested that the style of each of the three prayers suggests a gradual move toward fuller Eucharistic praying—Eucharistic Prayer for Masses with Children I for younger children, Eucharistic Prayer for Masses with Children II for primary school children, and Eucharistic Prayer for Masses with Children III for older preadolescents. What is precluded is using these prayers in the weekly Sunday Masses of the parish. I have heard priest celebrants use the Preface of the Sunday then stitch back together the Eucharistic Prayer for Masses with Children without the acclamations. This is not in the spirit of the *Directory for Masses with Children* or of the *General Instruction of the Roman Missal*. Considered use of these prayers in assemblies with a majority of children can help them learn the patterns of the Eucharistic Prayer and foster a source for further reflection on what praying the Eucharistic Prayer means and how to live that out. They are intended, as are all the adaptations mentioned in the *Directory for Masses with Children*, to lead our children to full, conscious, and active participation in the full Sunday assembly. This is why the *Directory for Masses with Children* also stressed the role of catechesis.

PASTORAL ADVANTAGES OF USING THE PRAYERS FROM THE APPENDIX

The liturgical life of a parish, its liturgical spirituality, and its liturgical imagination can be fostered by a careful and intentional incorporation of the Eucharistic Prayers in the appendix to the Order of Mass in the Sunday repertoire. In the case of the Eucharistic Prayers for Reconciliation and the Eucharistic Prayer for Various Needs, we hear the mystery of salvation unfolded through the central images of reconciliation and journey. With the Eucharistic Prayers for Masses with Children, the Paschal Mystery is unfolded with a narrative and a literary style that attends to the context of children and the aim of drawing them more deeply into participation in the liturgy. All of these prayers were composed out of their specific context, but their inclusion in the repertoire of Eucharistic Prayers in the Roman Rite speaks to the way that local churches, major events, and the generational diversity of the liturgical assembly contribute to the wider Church even today. ♦

Notes

1. *Guidelines to Assist Catechesis on the Anaphoras of the Mass* (2 June 1968), 244, section 4, no. 4. In the *Documents on the Liturgy: 1963–1979: Conciliar, Papal, Curial Texts* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 1983).

2. For a detailed history of the Eucharistic Prayers for Reconciliation, see R. McCarron, “EP RI and II: History of the Latin Text and Rite,” in *A Commentary on the Order of Mass of The Roman Missal*, ed. Edward Foley, et al. (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2011), 453–463. The immediate postconciliar history is authoritatively presented by Annibale Bugnini, *La Riforma Liturgica (1948–1975): Nuova edizione riveduta e arricchita di note e di supplementi per una lettura analitica* (Rome: CLV, 1997).

3. Walter Brueggemann, *The Prophetic Imagination* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1989), especially chapter 4, which bears this title.

4. See the section on the Eucharistic Prayer for Various Needs and my “History of the Text” and “Theology of the Latin Text and Rite,” in *A Commentary on the Order of Mass of The Roman Missal*.

5. *Synodos* referred to a meeting or assembly, which eventually became closely associated with ecclesiastical meetings. The etymology of *synodos* is from the Greek, whose parts can be roughly rendered as traveling or journeying or doing things together.

6. See LG, 7 and 21; and chapter 7.

7. I discuss the historical precedents for this literary structure in McCarron, “History of the Latin Text and Rite.”

8. *The Roman Missal*, “Appendix to the Order of Mass” (2010).

9. See *Directory for Masses with Children*, 50–52, concerning presidential prayers.

10. See Bugnini, 472–476, for the details.

11. While I am unable to find documentation, I have collected anecdotal evidence that the International Commission on English in the Liturgy undertook an experimental use of these prayers with children of various ages in selected parishes, with the project overseen by specialists in liturgy, language, and children’s catechesis before their first appearance in booklet form. These concerns for a holistic approach to preparing the Eucharistic Prayers for Masses with Children were raised in Eucharistic Prayers for Masses with Children, Introduction, 10.

12. USCCB, *Eucharistic Prayers for Masses with Children for Use with the Roman Missal*, third edition (Washington, DC, 2011).

RICHARD E. MCCARRON, PHD, is associate professor of liturgy at Catholic Theological Union, Chicago, IL (<https://ctu.edu/faculty/richard-mccarron/>).

At www.PastoralLiturgy.org

Find and share this article with parish staff and the liturgy committee at the following URL:
<http://www.pastoralliturgy.org/resources/VaryingtheEucharisticPrayersEnrichesTheLiturgyandAssembly.pdf>