

The Eucharist: Sacrament of Transformation and Reconciliation

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Let us open with a simple prayer:

Lord, give me the ear of a disciple, that I might hear your word and do it,
that I might love your word and share it, and that I might celebrate in the Eucharist
your reconciling love for the world. Amen.

What I propose to do today is less a lecture than a form of meditation on how we prepare to enter deeply into the Eucharist, how we develop that listening ear, that contemplative mind, but at the same time, how we move fully into the celebration with a consciousness of Christ's reconciling action so that when we leave the Eucharist and hear the words, "The mass is ended, go in peace, glorifying the Lord by your lives," we really go out empowered to extend the reconciling, healing love of Christ to the world around us.

So I've chosen excerpts from some prefaces and Eucharistic prayers, especially ones that may not be the ones we hear as frequently, and a couple prayers from votive masses for special occasions, to highlight this theme of reconciliation, which Christ is about constantly for and in us, encouraging us to be agents of reconciliation.

Excerpts from Eucharistic prayers:

- **Eucharistic prayer III, with which we are probably more familiar, uses the following phrases:**

-you willed to reconcile us to yourself

**-may this sacrifice of our reconciliation, we pray, O Lord,
advance the peace and salvation of the world....**

This prayer assumes our full, active and conscious participation, to be sure, and reminds me of Annie Dillard’s famous admonition that we’d better go to worship armed with crash helmets....

*“On the whole, I do not find Christians, outside of the catacombs, sufficiently sensible of conditions. Does anyone have the foggiest idea what sort of power we so blithely invoke? Or, as I suspect, does no one believe a word of it? The churches are children playing on the floor with their chemistry sets, mixing up a batch of TNT to kill a Sunday morning. It is madness to wear ladies’ straw hats and velvet hats to church; we should all be wearing crash helmets. Ushers should issue life preservers and signal flares; they should lash us to our pews. For the sleeping god may wake someday and take offense, or the waking god may draw us out to where we can never return.” (Annie Dillard, *Teaching a Stone to Talk*. Harper and Row, 1982)*

- **From Eucharistic prayer IV:**

**Open our eyes
to the needs of our brothers and sisters;
inspire in us words and actions
to comfort those who labor and are burdened.
Make us serve them truly,
after the example of Christ and at his command,
And may your Church stand as a living witness
to truth and freedom,
to peace and justice,
that all people may be raised up to a new hope.**

It's worth remembering that we, as the Church called to follow the example of Christ, need to look at some of the contradictions which appear at times in our behavior towards those "who labor and are burdened" and on whom we may add extra burdens by a lack of inclusion or a lack of compassion... Are we as compassionate as Christ? Do we really stand as a living witness to peace and justice and the kind of compassion that really will raise all people to a new hope?

- **From the Preface to Eucharistic Prayer for Reconciliation I**

**It is truly right and just
That we should always give you thanks,
Lord, holy Father, almighty and eternal God.**

**For you do not cease to spur us on
To possess a more abundant life
And, being rich in mercy,
You constantly offer pardon
And call on sinners
To trust in your forgiveness alone.**

**Never did you turn away from us,
And though time and again we have broken your covenant,
You have bound the human family to yourself
Through Jesus your Son, our Redeemer,
With a new bond of love so tight
That it can never be undone.**

**Even now you set before your people
A time of grace and reconciliation,
And as they turn back to you in spirit,
You grant them hope in Christ Jesus
And a desire to be of service to all,
While they entrust themselves
More fully to the Holy Spirit.**

**And so, filled with wonder,
We extol the power of your love,
And proclaiming our joy
At the salvation that comes from you,
We join in the heavenly realm of countless hosts
As without end we acclaim...**

- **From Eucharistic Prayer for Reconciliation II**

**...by your Spirit you move human hearts
that enemies may speak to each other again,
adversaries join hands,
and peoples seek to meet together.**

**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.**

**But.... Our human hearts have to be open to the Spirit's
Working in us, on us, between us, among us... and this is where
the hard work begins when the mass is ended, but we're
commissioned to go out and live the gospel by our lives.**

**Think of the last time you were in need of reconciliation in a
relationship. Or the last time you observed brokenness which
needed work to be resolved, and you helped achieve a
breakthrough. Or, even better: the last story you heard of
someone who overcame hatred by love or worked to help enemies
to speak to each other again... I want to read this prayer again,
and ask you to consider it a possible program for Lent...**

An even more succinct and powerful call to reconciliation, which serves as a summary of the paschal mystery and the One always pleading for us – this is the heart of Preface 3 of 5 possible Easter prefaces:

It is truly right and just, our duty and our salvation, at all times to acclaim you, O Lord, but in this time above all to laud you yet more gloriously,

When Christ our Passover has been sacrificed.

He never ceases to offer himself for us

but defends us and ever pleads our cause before you;

He is the sacrificial Victim who dies no more,

the Lamb, once slain, who lives for ever.

Consider this powerful element of the prayer:

- Christ our intercessor who not only pleads our cause ceaselessly but defends us before God [I don't know about you but I'm constantly being asked by people to pray for them, and I'm so humbled by their trust that I take their requests seriously – so it comforts me immensely to remember that I can lean on the great Pleader and Reconciler who “never ceases to offer himself for us” and to put things right...]
- So many people today need this image of One who constantly pleads our cause, who always loves us – consider the highest rate of suicide among our teens and vets today and how powerful it would be if we

could translate for them the belief contained in this prayer: you have an advocate always available and praying for you!

Excerpts from Votive masses for special occasions:

- **From the votive Mass in time of war or civil disturbance – the prayer over the gifts..**

Be mindful, Lord, that your Son, who himself is peace,
has destroyed our hatreds by his Blood;
look in mercy on our evil deeds
and grant that to those whom you love
this sacrifice may restore peace and tranquility.
Through Christ our Lord.

A couple observations about this wonderfully strong prayer:

- Do you remember that the prayer over the gifts is not only over the bread and wine but over US, the people of God, the Body of Christ, meant to be transformed, along with the bread and wine, into the living Body of Christ and sent out to be Good News for all?
- Yes, the One who IS OUR PEACE will destroy our hatred by his blood, by his Sacrifice, again and again, but we'll need to recognize those hatreds and blindnesses and evil deeds and attitudes and THUS our sacrifice will restore peace and tranquility. This is where God's action and our openness meet.
- A final observation/question: will we go forth from here, committed to BE the ONE BODY OF CHRIST, sign of God's love for us and for the world? That's my prayer for us all.