



Praying the Mass Anew

*The New Translation of The Roman Missal
and Our Actual Participation at Mass*

17. The Eucharistic Prayer: Part II – The Consecration

In the last article, the first part of the Eucharistic Prayer, consisting of the Preface and the “Holy, Holy, Holy,” was treated. In the current article, we will look specifically at the words by which the bread and wine are changed into the Body and Blood of Jesus Christ in the consecration. These words of consecration are often called “the words of institution,” as it was by these very words that Jesus Christ gave us the gift of the Eucharistic sacrifice.

Before treating these words directly, it is important to place them within the whole of the Eucharistic Prayer. In the *Roman Missal*, there are multiple options for the Eucharistic Prayer. Most missalettes will print some of the prayers according to their familiar names, calling them “Eucharistic Prayer I,” “II,” “III,” and “IV.” Beyond these four, there are additional options that are not frequently printed in these booklets. Within all of the options are particular consistencies in wording, and in what is asked for in prayer. For example, all of the Eucharistic Prayer options will contain words that “remember” the saving works of Christ, along with prayers for the unity of the Church, for Church leaders [particularly the Pope and the local bishop], for those who have died, and of course, the narration of Jesus’ act of giving us the

Eucharist at the Last Supper. While the words used in expressing these prayers and narratives vary between the Eucharistic prayers, all of them use the same formula for the words of institution – mainly because these are the words of Jesus Christ himself, handed down in the Church through the centuries, by which this great sacrifice is to be properly offered – even if all of the scriptural sources for these words are not an exact match.

The words of institution are drawn from the Last Supper accounts found in the Gospels of Matthew, Mark, and Luke, and as related by Paul in 1 Corinthians 11. Within the renditions of the words, what is absolutely key is the connection of the Last Supper with his crucifixion: that he *will* offer his body and shed his blood as the blood of the covenant for the forgiveness of sins. His words establish that the Eucharist is the way to “perpetuate” his sacrifice – that all may share in his offering, and in the forgiveness of sins that his sacrifice accomplishes. That is to say, Jesus’ words at the Last Supper instituting the Eucharist intend to make his sacrificial death present in all times and places, that all generations may be able to partake of his saving act of love. Looking at the words themselves will help us to understand this truth:

Previous Version

Consecration of the Bread

Take this, all of you, and eat it:
this is my body
which will be given up for you.

Consecration of the Wine

Take this, all of you, and drink from it:
this is the cup of my blood,
the blood of the new and everlasting covenant.
It will be shed for you and for all
so that sins may be forgiven.
Do this in memory of me.

New Translation

Take this, all of you, and **eat of it**,
for this is my body,
which will be given up for you.

Take this, all of you, and drink from it,
for this is the **chalice** of my blood,
the blood of the new and **eternal** covenant,
which will be poured out for you, **and for many**
for the forgiveness of sins.
Do this in memory of me.

Notable Changes:

- “eat of it” – as members of the body of Christ, we partake “of” the sacrifice.
- “for [this is my body/this is the chalice...]” – connects the realities of that which is sacrificed (his body and blood) with the act of partaking in the sacrifice.
- “chalice” – more literal (Latin text use the word “calix,” which literally means “chalice.”) This word also denotes elevated use of language, and therefore inviting greater attention to the sacred.
- “poured out” – more descriptive of the Eucharist as a sacrifice. For, in ratifying the covenant, the blood of the sacrifice is literally “poured out” upon the altar (see Exodus 24:6). In addition, the sacrificial offerings included the “pouring out” of the libation (usually wine) upon the sacrifice (see Exodus 29:38-40)
- “for many” – Latin text says “pro multis,” which literally is “for many” (not “for all,” which would be “pro omnibus” in Latin). These words have been in longstanding use in the Church and thus were to be retained in any translations. The Latin version of Bible (called “the Vulgate”) uses these words in Last Supper accounts of Matthew and Mark. In addition, Isaiah 53:11 is a key text: that the suffering servant will “justify many.” This does not mean that Christ died only for some – rather it implies that his sacrifice continues to be effective as the “many” continues to increase – whereas to say “all” might render the action as though its effectiveness were already exhausted. Another way to interpret: salvation becomes effective only in those who cooperate with Christ. Thus, to say “for all” is inaccurate, as unfortunately some are unwilling to accept Christ.

The words of institution, as the words of Christ pronounced by the ordained priest during the proper time at Mass, are effective in consecrating the Eucharist. Through these words, the Body and Blood of Jesus Christ are made present, that we may partake of the same sacrifice that Jesus offered once for all, in giving his body and blood on the cross. Hence, these words have extreme importance.

All are invited to reflect on the changes and the reasons for the changes, as given above – that all might be able to enter into the consecration at Mass with greater understanding of Christ’s saving love. Such understanding, it is hoped, will promote a greater desire to share in the offering, by making an offering of self, (which we will speak of in the next article.)

Question of the Week:

➤ ***If the words of consecration are the words of Jesus, how can we change them?***

The issue here is not changing the words themselves, but the accuracy of the translation. Once more, the Latin text that is the standard text is not changing – only our English expression of these words. Thus the words themselves are still as have been handed down for centuries.

On the other hand, we must also keep in mind that the approval of all texts for liturgy belongs to Holy See (the Vatican), and that there have been times in history where words expressing faith have been changed – not as a change in teachings, but to give greater clarity to a truth that was always known. Thus, changes of words in such important prayers, while they should be rare, are by no means problematic when necessary.