

## **Eucharistic Prayer I (The Roman Canon)**

As we continue our journey through the Eucharistic Prayer, we turn now to one of the elements in the Eucharistic prayer that is the same every time the Mass is celebrated, and which also brings us really to the heart of the Eucharistic Prayer itself. And that is the words of institution, or the consecration of the bread and wine, as well as the elevation of the consecrated host and the consecrated chalice in the midst of the Eucharistic Prayer. Let me give you the official description of this part of the Mass from the *General Instruction of the Roman Missal* that's at the beginning of the Roman Missal. It says this:

The institution narrative and Consecration, by which, by means of the words and actions of Christ, that Sacrifice is effected which Christ himself instituted during the Last Supper, when he offered his Body and Blood under the species of bread and wine, gave them to the Apostles to eat and drink, and leaving with the latter the command to perpetuate this same mystery<sup>1</sup>

Now that we've looked at the common elements that are present in every Eucharistic prayer, every time the Mass is celebrated, we want to focus our attention on the particular forms of the Eucharistic prayers that are given to us in the Missal. We want to especially look at the four major Eucharistic prayers in the Roman Missal, which are entitled Eucharistic Prayer I, also known as the Roman Canon, Eucharistic Prayer II, Eucharistic Prayer III, and Eucharistic Prayer IV.

Now, before we look at these, I just want to begin with a comment from Pope Benedict XVI. In his Apostolic Exhortation, *Sacrament of Charity*, this document was released in 2007 in the wake of a synod of Bishops for the universal Church on the Eucharist in the life of the Church, and in that magisterial document, Pope Benedict says this about the different Eucharistic prayers in the Roman Mass:

The Eucharistic Prayer is "the centre and summit of the entire celebration". Its importance deserves to be adequately emphasized. The different Eucharistic Prayers contained in the Missal have been handed down to us by

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<sup>1</sup> *General Instruction of the Roman Missal*, no. 79d.

the Church's living Tradition and are noteworthy for their inexhaustible theological and spiritual richness. The faithful need to be enabled to appreciate that richness.<sup>2</sup>

That's what I'm going to try to do in this series of videos looking at each Eucharistic prayer. We want to try to appreciate the inexhaustible theological and spiritual richness of the Roman Canon, the first Eucharistic prayer, and then Eucharistic Prayers II, III and IV in subsequent videos.

In this video, I want to focus on Eucharistic Prayer I, commonly known as the Roman Canon. In order to do that, let's just begin by highlighting a few identifying features of Eucharistic Prayer I. So, for example, Eucharistic Prayer I, the Roman Canon, is the longest of the four Eucharistic prayers in the contemporary Roman Missal. It's also very, very ancient. Parts of Eucharistic Prayer I, the Roman Canon, go all the way back at least as far as the time of St. Ambrose of Milan in the 4th century, who's our earliest witness to the words of the prayer that we say to this day. The Roman Canon, Eucharistic Prayer I, is also important because it has multiple authors. As we're going to see, it's a very long prayer and it's composed of a lot of different parts, a lot of different prayers and petitions. Parts of it are attributed to both unknown writers, like an unknown scholar in the ancient Church, as well as certain verses and certain lines in the prayer are, according to tradition, authored by Pope Sst. Gelasius, Pope St. Leo I and, above all, Pope St. Gregory the Great.

Another identifying feature of Eucharistic Prayer I, this would be the one that's the most easy to recognize, is that it is the Eucharistic prayer with the long lists of saints and martyrs. So when you hear the priest talk about Peter and Paul, Andrew and James, John, Thomas, James, Philip, Bartholomew, Linus, Cletus, Clement, Sixtus, Cornelius, that long list of popes and martyrs, that tells you you are hearing Eucharistic Prayer I, the Roman Canon. We'll come back and look at why those long lists are there. Another element of Eucharistic Prayer I that is interesting and that will signal to you that you're hearing this one is the words "To you, therefore," right? So at the beginning of Eucharistic Prayer I, after we have the initial dialogue ("The Lord be with you" and "With your spirit", "Lift up your hearts,") and then

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<sup>2</sup> Pope Benedict VXi, *Sacrament of Charity*, 48.

the priest will say a preface, and then we will all together sing the "Holy, Holy, Holy" and "Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord." After that Sanctus, that Benedictus is sung, the priest is going to begin the prayer proper by saying:

To you, therefore, most merciful Father, we make humble prayer and petition through Jesus Christ, your Son, our Lord...<sup>3</sup>

So when you hear that expression, "To you, therefore," in Latin "Te Igitur," that's the beginning of the Roman Canon, Eucharistic Prayer I. And this prayer is significant because out of all four Eucharistic prayers, it's the one with the most ancient pedigree. It's the one that is particular to the Roman Rite and to the Roman Church, and for that reason, according to the Roman Missal, the General Instruction at the beginning of the Missal:

*Eucharistic Prayer I, or the Roman Canon, which may always be used, ...it is especially suited for use on Sundays... (GIRM 365)*

Because it has a certain pride of place in the tradition, Eucharistic Prayer I can always be used at any Catholic Mass. Now, we'll see that there are some other Eucharistic prayers and the Church will give recommendations for when they're used, but with regard to the Roman Canon, it can always be used and is specially suited for Sunday Mass.

All right, now with those kind of identifying markers in mind, now we're going to turn to the text of Eucharistic Prayer I itself. Now, one of the challenges in teaching this particular prayer is that it is long. But I do think that in order to do it justice, before we ask, where is it from in Scripture? Where is it from in tradition? We need to actually call to mind the words of the prayer itself, so I'm going to read through it with you and I want to highlight some things as we go along that will come up when we look at the traditional and mystical roots of the prayer in the second part of the video. Let's just work through it together. If you have a Roman Missal, you can follow along in the Order of Mass, paragraphs 84 and following. This is how the prayer begins:

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<sup>3</sup> Roman Missal, *Order of Mass*, nos. 83-97.

*To you, therefore (Latin Te igitur), most merciful Father, we make humble prayer and petition through Jesus Christ, your Son, our Lord: that you accept and bless † these gifts, these offerings, these holy and unblemished sacrifices... which we offer you firstly for your holy catholic Church. Be pleased to grant her peace, to guard, unite and govern her throughout the whole world, together with your servant N. our Pope and N. our Bishop, and all those who, holding to the truth, hand on the catholic and apostolic faith.*

Pause there. You'll notice already that the naming of the Pope is a distinctive feature of the Roman Rite of the Roman Canon. We're praying in union with the Pope, and not just the Pope, with the local Bishop. It continues:

*Remember, Lord (Latin Memento, Domini), your servants N. and N. and all gathered here, whose faith and devotion are known to you. For them, we offer you this sacrifice of praise or they offer it for themselves and all who are dear to them: for the redemption of their souls, in hope of health and well-being, and paying their homage to you, the eternal God, living and true.*

Pause here. You'll notice in the video that I did on the Offertory, we talked about how the priest offers the body, blood, soul, and divinity of Christ, and then the people offer themselves in union with them, so that the whole Church, head and body, are offering the Mass. The same thing you see here in the Roman Canon, right? This idea that we offer it, or they offer it for themselves. This is the priesthood of the baptized in the prayer, being exercised in this offering. It continues:

*In communion (Latin Communicantes) with those whose memory we venerate, especially the glorious ever-Virgin Mary, Mother of our God and Lord, Jesus Christ, and blessed Joseph, her Spouse, your blessed Apostles and Martyrs, Peter and Paul, Andrew, (James, John, Thomas, James, Philip, Bartholomew, Matthew, Simon and Jude; Linus, Cletus, Clement, Sixtus, Cornelius, Cyprian, Lawrence, Chrysogonus, John and Paul, Cosmas and Damian) and all your Saints; we ask that through their merits and prayers, in all things we may be defended by your protecting help.*

Pause there again. This list of the Apostles and early Roman popes and martyrs is going to be, again, one of the distinctive features of the Roman Canon. And we'll look at that list in just a minute, and you'll see how basically what it's doing is it's calling on the names not only of the Apostles, but of Roman popes in particular, because this is the Roman Eucharistic Prayer. It continues:

*Therefore, Lord, we pray: graciously accept this (Latin Hanc igitur) oblation of our service, that of your whole family, order our days in your peace, and command that we be delivered from eternal damnation and counted among the flock of those you have chosen.*

Be pleased, O God, we pray, to bless, acknowledge, and approve *this offering (Latin quam oblationem)* in every respect, make it spiritual and acceptable, so that it may become for us the Body and Blood of your most beloved Son, our Lord Jesus Christ.

Now it moves into what's known as the Institution Narrative with the words of consecration:

On the day before he was to suffer, he took bread in his holy and venerable hands, and with eyes raised to heaven, to you, O God, his almighty Father, giving you thanks, he said the blessing, broke the bread, and gave it to his disciples, saying... [Words of Consecration] In a similar way, when supper was ended, he took this precious chalice...

Note the reference to "this chalice". That's unique to the Roman Canon.

...in his holy and venerable hands, and once more giving you thanks, he said the blessing and gave the chalice to his disciples, saying... [Words of Consecration]

Now once the consecration and elevation is done, the prayer picks up:

*Therefore, O Lord, as we celebrate the memorial (Latin Unde et memores) of the blessed Passion, the Resurrection from the dead, and the glorious Ascension into heaven of Christ, your Son, our Lord, we, your servants and your holy people, offer to your glorious majesty from the gifts that you have given us, this pure victim, this holy victim, this spotless victim, the holy Bread of eternal life and the Chalice of everlasting salvation.*

If you pause here, just to highlight, you'll notice the reference to Passion, Death, Resurrection, and Ascension. That is the core of what the Church refers to as the Paschal Mystery. It's not just Calvary, it's not just Easter. It's the Passion, Death, Resurrection, and Ascension, the whole Paschal Mystery of Christ. You'll also notice that repetition of "victim, victim, victim," right? The Latin word *Hostia*, is where we get the word "host" from. So the sacrificial offering is very pronounced in the Roman Canon. It continues:

*Be pleased to look upon these offerings (Latin Supra quae) with a serene and kindly countenance, and to accept them, as once you were pleased to accept the gifts of your servant Abel the just, the sacrifice of Abraham, our father in faith, and the offering of your high priest Melchizedek, a holy sacrifice, a spotless victim, (Latin immaculatam hostiam).*

Pause here. You'll notice this is a distinctive feature of the Roman Canon as well, the reference to Abel, Abraham, and Melchizedek, these three figures from the Book of Genesis, all of whom offer sacrifice. We'll look at them in just a moment. That's a distinctive feature. If you hear Abel, Abraham, and Melchizedek, you're hearing the Roman Canon, you're hearing the Eucharistic Prayer I. Then it continues:

*In humble prayer (Latin Supplices) we ask you, almighty God: command that these gifts be borne by the hands of your holy Angel to your altar on high in the sight of your divine majesty, so that all of us, who through this participation at the altar receive the most holy Body and Blood of your Son, may be filled with every grace and heavenly blessing.*

So the image of the Angel bringing the offering to the heavenly altar, also key feature of the Roman Canon. Then it concludes. The last parts of it are a series of intercessions:

Remember, also, Lord, your servants N. and N., who have gone before us with the sign of faith and rest in the sleep of peace. Grant them, O Lord, we pray, and all who sleep in Christ, a place of refreshment, light and peace.

*To us, also (Latin Nobis quoque), your servants, who, though sinners, hope in your abundant mercies, graciously grant some share and fellowship with your holy Apostles and Martyrs:*

And here comes the second list in the Roman Canon:

*with John the Baptist, Stephen, Matthias, Barnabas, (Ignatius, Alexander, Marcellinus, Peter, Felicity, Perpetua, Agatha, Lucy, Agnes, Cecilia, Anastasia) and all your Saints; admit us, we beseech you, into their company, not weighing our merits, but granting us your pardon, through Christ our Lord.*

Pause there. You'll notice, that list is different from the first list, and it is a list entirely of martyrs, beginning with John the Baptist, and then seven male martyrs and seven female martyrs. So it's the men and women who are venerated in the Roman Church as martyrs, asking for their prayers. Then, finally, it continues:

Through whom you continue to make all these good things, O Lord; you sanctify them, fill them with life, bless them, and bestow them upon us.  
(Roman Missal, *Order of Mass*, nos. 83-97)

And then, as with all of the Eucharistic prayers, it's going to end with a doxology. Doxology means a word of praise. *Doxa* is praise or glory, *Logos* is word. So doxology is a word of praise:

Through him, and with him, and in him, O God, almighty Father, in the unity of the Holy Spirit, all glory and honor is yours, for ever and ever.

And the people say, “Amen.” That's your signal that you're at the end of any Eucharistic prayer, that doxology “through him...with him...in him,” *Per Ipsum* is the Latin name. So that's the text of the Roman Canon. It takes about four or five minutes just to read through that text itself. Now let's ask ourselves. Where's this from in the Bible, and where's it from in the tradition of the Church?

Let's start with Scripture. The Scriptural roots of the Roman Canon, I could do hours just on this. I mean, there's so many things going on in this very long prayer, but for our purposes, I just want to highlight a few. The first is what we could call Eucharistic typology in the Old Testament. The idea that the Eucharist is not just something that Jesus created at the Last Supper. It's something that was prefigured in the Old Testament itself by the sacrifices of the Old Testament. And in the Roman Canon, three are signaled out. The sacrifice of Abel, who offers the firstling of his flock that is acceptable to God, in the famous story of Cain and Abel. Second, the sacrifice of bread and wine that Melchizedek offers in thanksgiving to God for Abraham's victory in Genesis 14 — Abel sacrifices in Genesis 4. And then finally, number three, the famous sacrifice of Isaac, where Abraham is willing but stopped from sacrificing his only beloved son on the mountain of Moriah in Genesis 22.

So what the Roman Canon is doing is pulling three famous acts of sacrifice. One of a lamb, one of bread and wine, that's Melchizedek, and then one of the beloved son with Abraham, and saying all three of those sacrifices are in a sense being fulfilled in the sacrifice of the Eucharist. So there's a typology of the Eucharist that's directly tied to the Old Testament patriarchs to show that those sacrificial acts that they engaged in are, in a sense, pointing forward to and being fulfilled in the sacrifice of the Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world, Jesus Christ. The bread and wine the unbloody sacrifice of the Eucharist that happens at every Mass. And then finally, the offering by the Father of his only beloved Son Jesus Christ for the salvation of the world, that will happen not on Moriah in the Old Testament, but on Calvary in the New Testament. Which if you look at 2 Chronicles 3:1, in the Old Testament itself, it tells us that the hill called Moriah is in Jerusalem. It's the same mountain where the Temple would be built and where



Christ himself will be sacrificed as the eternal beloved Son of the Father. So there's a lot of rich Eucharistic typology in the Roman Canon.

What about that strange image of the Angel bringing the offering to heaven? This is one that often catches people's attention if they're listening to the words of the Roman Canon, or reading along in the Missal, and they see that reference to the Angel. What's that about? Well, that is drawing on the imagery of the Book of Revelation 8, which actually points out that not only is there an altar on earth where sacrifices are being offered, like in the book of Hebrews 13 it says, "we have an altar from which the priest into the temple have no right to eat." Right? So the early Christians had this idea that where the Eucharist was offered, those tables were not just tables, they were altars of sacrifice. They recognize that those were in a sense of visible signs of a heavenly altar were an Angel in heaven would offer the prayers of the faithful to God. So in Revelation 8 we read:

*And another angel came and stood at the altar with a golden censer; and he was given much incense to mingle with the prayers of all the saints...<sup>4</sup>*  
(Revelation 8:3-4)

So if I had more time I could get into this in some more detail, but it's fascinating. This actually reflects not only Book of Revelation, but an ancient Jewish idea. So in ancient Judaism there was a deep set belief, we see it in the Dead Sea Scroll and we see it in other writings, that what the angels do in heaven in the heavenly sanctuary is what the priests do on earth in the earthly temple, and vice versa. So that whenever the priest is offering a sacrifice at the altar in the earthly temple, in a sense he's kind of like a visible sign of the heavenly worship and the heavenly offering happening in the heavenly temple, in which the ministers are not human beings, they're not earthly priests who suffer and die. They are the angels. The angels are the heavenly priests, the heavenly ministers who offer worship to God at the heavenly sanctuary. And the prayers of the people on earth are offered by the

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<sup>4</sup> Unless otherwise indicated, all Bible citations/quotations herein are from *The Holy Bible: Revised Standard Version, Catholic Edition*. New York: National Council of Churches of Christ in the USA, 1994.

angels at the heavenly altar. So in Eucharistic Prayer I, when the priest refers to the Angel bringing the offering to the altar in heaven:

*In humble prayer (Latin Supplices) we ask you, almighty God: command that these gifts be borne by the hands of your holy Angel to your altar on high...*

That is a deeply Jewish understanding of sacrifice, of the temple and of priestly ministry as a kind of earthly imitation of angelic ministry on high. So that is very biblical as well.

What about the the lists of the Apostles and Saints? This is really fascinating. And one of my favorite parts of the Roman Canon is the prayer about communion with the Blessed Virgin Mary, with St. Joseph, and then the Apostles and martyrs. And if you chart these out, you can make two lists here. It's basically 24 names. The first are the 12 names of the Apostles, with Paul substituted for Mathias. He'll come in later, he'll be mentioned later, but it's the 11 original Apostles with St. Paul are the 1st 12, and then the 2nd 12 named in this list are a series of popes and either martyrs that were killed in Rome and belonged to the Roman Church, or martyrs who were sacrificed who were in communion with Rome, like St. Cyprian of North Africa. So let me just go through this for a second because it's powerful to look at this. If you do some research on this, you can see how each of the Apostles died. And we tend to forget about the martyrdoms of the Apostles and what Jesus was calling them to. But I'll just run through the list:

1. Peter: 1<sup>st</sup> Pope, martyred in Rome
2. Paul: the Apostle, martyred in Rome.
3. Andrew: martyred in Greece.
4. James: martyred in Jerusalem.
5. John: imprisoned on Patmos.

But there's debate about whether he was martyred or not. Most of the tradition says that they tried to martyr him, but that they couldn't martyr him, and he was the only Apostle who didn't suffer physical martyrdom because he had stood at the foot of the cross. Like in other words, he was set apart and was not martyred at the end of

his life because he had already offered himself by being willing to die by standing at the foot of the cross at Calvary. That is a kind of interesting role for John. But the other Apostles, all of them are martyred.

6. Thomas: martyred in India.
7. James (the Less): martyred in Jerusalem.
8. Philip: martyred in Asia Minor.
9. Bartholomew: martyred in Armenia.
10. Matthew: martyred in Persia.
11. Simon: martyred in Jerusalem.
12. Jude: martyred in Syria.

So we have this long list of the Apostles going out to the four winds, and each one of them meeting death at the hands of either stoning or decapitation, crucifixion, whatever it might be, they were all configured to Christ through imprisonment, through suffering, and ultimately through death, with the sole exception of John. Now, when you get to the second-half of the list, these are names that are often less familiar to Christians, but they were extremely important in the Roman Church. Because many of the early popes of Rome, the bishops, were martyrs and many of the early Saints in the Roman Church were martyrs. So just again to run through the list, just to give you a quick overview:

1. Linus: 2<sup>nd</sup> pope, martyred in Rome.
2. Cletus: 3<sup>rd</sup> pope, martyred in Rome.
3. Clement: 4<sup>th</sup> pope, martyred in Rome.
4. Sixtus: 8<sup>th</sup> pope, martyred in Rome.

And then you can see there's a period of some peace

5. Cornelius: 22<sup>nd</sup> pope, martyred in Rome.
6. Cyprian: bishop, martyred in Africa

Cyprian is unique because he's the only African in the list. He's a Bishop who was martyred in the church in Africa, but he had a deep devotion to and communion with the Roman Church.

7. Lawrence: deacon, martyred in Rome.
8. Chrysogonus: lay martyr in Rome.
9. John: layman, martyred in Rome.
10. Paul: brother of John, martyred in Rome.
11. Cosmas: Arab doctor, martyred in Rome.
12. Damian: Arab doctor, martyr in Rome.

So that list gives you a window into the way the early Roman Church conceived the Eucharistic Prayer. It is that “I’m not only saying this prayer of the Eucharist in communion with the Apostolic Church represented by the bishops, I’m also saying it in communion with the blood of the martyrs who have been shed before me for this local church, for the Church of Rome. So if there’s anything about the Roman Canon that is distinctively Roman, it is this list of the Twelve apostles and the twelve Roman Saints. But always notice, the local and universal together. The popes and martyrs reflect the Roman Church. The apostles reflect the universal Church.

With that said, what about that second list of martyrs? Well, I don’t have to go through these in a ton of detail, but one of the distinctive features of the Roman Canon is that it doesn’t have just one list of martyrs. It has two. And the second list, as I have already mentioned, is just focused on martyrs in general, with a distinctive emphasis on John the Baptist at the head of the list because he’s really the first martyr for Christ. We tend to think of St. Stephen as the first martyr, but John the Baptist gives his life as a witness to the coming of the Messiah. And in that sense he is kind of the greatest of the martyrs. And there is a list of seven male martyrs: Stephen, Matthias, Barnabas, Ignatius, Alexander, Marcellinus, and Peter. And then seven female martyrs: Felicity, Perpetua, Agatha, Lucy, Agnes, Cecilia and Anastasia. And if you look at a chart of these martyrs, one of the things you are going to notice is that they all lived and died between the 1st and the 4th centuries AD. And so this is one of the elements of the Roman Canon that enables us to give a date to it. Which obviously at the very earliest this list could have been compiled would be the end of the 4th century, because that’s where the last martyr added to the list is named. Now it could have grown overtime, but this helps us to date the actual composition of this part of the Roman prayer, of the Roman Canon, as being

sometime in the 4th century AD at the earliest. And as we'll see in a minute, that's going to be congruent with what we read about in the tradition of how the prayer was composed and when it was finalized in the Roman Church. But for now I just want to emphasize once again that in the early Church, you might not know this, but you should, the Liturgy of the Eucharist was celebrated in two key places. In the early centuries it would often be celebrated in what were called house churches, right? These are mentioned in the New Testament, where the people would gather together in their house, especially during times of persecution. And then another place where the Eucharist would be celebrated was at the tombs of martyrs, right? So it made sense, if you were celebrating the Eucharist at the tomb of a martyr, to name that martyr during the prayer and ask for that martyr's intercession. So we see here a collection of all the various famous martyrs, both male and female, going all the way back to St. John the Baptist as part of the Roman Canon. So you see a theology of intercession is part of this liturgy as well.

Okay, so those are just a few elements of the roots of the Roman Canon. What about its role in tradition in terms of how it developed overtime? Well, we could do a long study of that. If you want to go into depth, I would recommend a classic work by Josef Jungmann, a Jesuit scholar, called *The Mass of the Roman Rite*. This was published in the 40s and then updated later. It's a two volume set on the Mass, the history and development of the Roman liturgy, that I have mentioned before, but what I want to highlight here is that each volume is about 500 pages. And the second volume, which is about 500 pages, is devoted almost entirely just to Eucharistic Prayer I, just to the Roman Canon. Now there are other things in it, the Communion Rite and whatnot, but it is an in depth study of that prayer and of its historical development. If you want a shorter version of that, there's a classic work, it's a little older and a little dated, from the early 20th century, but it's still a classic from Adrian Fortescue, a British scholar, and he deals with the Eucharistic Prayer I, the Roman Canon, in the second half of the book in a little more concise format. Very clear, readable, and he'll give you lots of insights into its history and development in the tradition.

For our purposes here, I just want to hit a couple of highlights. First, this is crucial. St. Ambrose of Milan is the earliest witness we have to the words of the Eucharistic Prayer, right? So he's writing in the 4th century, and if you read

through his book *On the Sacraments*, this treatise *On the Sacraments*, where he's explaining the mysteries of the Eucharist to new believers, new Christians, he actually quotes word for word from the Eucharistic Prayer, and those words are in many cases almost identical to what will later make it into the Roman Canon. So, for example, I'll just read, this is from St. Ambrose's treatise. He says:

And the priest says: *“Therefore we call to mind his most glorious passion, his resurrection from hell, and his ascension into heaven. We offer you this spotless sacrifice, this spiritual sacrifice, this unbloody sacrifice, this holy bread and the cup of eternal life. We beseech and pray that you accept this offering upon your altar on high through the hands of your angels, just as you deigned to accept the gift of your just son Abel and the sacrifice of Abraham our Father and what the high priest Melchizedek offered to you.”*<sup>5</sup>

So you can hear there's some differences there, but it's clearly substantially the same as what we have in the Roman Canon. Also, I would add that if you look at his account of the words of consecration, they're going to be very similar to what we have in the Mass as well, although one thing that is missing is the expression mystery of faith. St. Ambrose does not give the expression the mystery of faith when he recounts the words of consecration, although by the 8th century and 9th century and later it will be part of the Roman Canon in the words of consecration. We cover that in the video on the consecration in more detail. Alright, so the question now becomes, well, if this is the Eucharistic Prayer I, if this is the Roman Canon, the prayer of the Church, who wrote it, right? It's kind of an interesting question to ask. Who wrote the Roman Canon? And the answer to that question is several different people, right? So in one of his famous letters, the earliest description we get about the author of the Roman Canon is actually from Pope St. Gregory the Great himself. For example, here is a copy, a collection of the letters of Pope St. Gregory the Great. So we have his actual correspondence, and in letter 26, one of the letters he wrote at the end of the sixth century, he actually says who he thinks is the author of the Eucharistic Prayer I, Roman Canon, in this letter to a bishop where there was some debate about saying the Our Father and the location of the Our Father in the liturgy. So just to put it in context, some people were

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<sup>5</sup> Ambrose, *On the Sacraments* 5.27-28. In Johnson, *Worship in the Early Church*, 2:58.

contesting the praying of the Our Father after the consecration and during the Communion Rite in the Roman liturgy as St. Gregory the Great was practicing it in the 6th century. So he responds to and defends the praying of the Lord's Prayer by contrasting the Lord's Prayer to the Roman Canon, contrasting the Lord's Prayer, which was written by Jesus to the Roman Canon, which was written by an unknown scholar. This is St. Gregory the Great himself:

The Lord's Prayer we say immediately after *the prayer* since it was the custom of the apostles to consecrate the offering by that same prayer only. It seemed to me highly unsuitable that we should say over the offering *a prayer composed by a scholastic* [Latin *scholasticus*] and not say over his Body and Blood the very prayer composed by our Redeemer.<sup>6</sup>

This is a really important statement here because I have actually heard some people say that the Roman Canon...some people would say it was written by Peter himself or that it was handed down to the Apostles by Jesus himself, basically, almost in the form that we have it today. This is just historically not reconcilable with what Pope Gregory the Great himself says. According to Gregory the Great, who is one of the most ancient witnesses we have to the authorship of the Roman Canon, the Roman Canon, the Eucharistic prayer that he was praying in the 6th century, was written by a scholar, was written by an unknown scholar. And he's contrasting that with the Our Father, who we know was written by Christ, or not written by, but, you know, composed by Christ and then handed down to the Apostles. So his point is if we're going to say the prayer of an unknown scholar in the Eucharistic prayer, then we should also certainly say the prayer that we know was composed by Christ during the Mass.

Now as soon as we say that, that does not mean that the Eucharistic Prayer was only written by this unknown scholar that Gregory the Great refers to. In fact, Gregory himself and other popes were known to have added various lines to the prayer. So if you look at the history of the Roman liturgy, you'll see, for example, that Pope St. Alexander in the 2nd century was the one who, according to tradition, added the institution narrative, sometimes called the Lord's Passion: "On the night

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<sup>6</sup> Gregory the Great, *Letter 26*. In Johnson, *Worship in the Early Church*, 4:68.

he was betrayed, he took bread in his holy and venerable hands,” so on and so forth. Pope St. Leo the Great in the 5th century was supposed to have added the lines, “a holy sacrifice, a spotless victim” to the prayer. Pope St. Gelasius, also a 5th century Pope, was described as being, according to the tradition, the first one to arrange the various parts of the Canon, of the Eucharistic Prayer, into its current form. So he was seen as having edited and rearranged some parts there. And then Pope St. Gregory the Great in the 6th century was particularly credited by the tradition with having added the line “and order our days in your peace, and command we be delivered from eternal damnation...” That line might be the one that catches your ears if you hear the Eucharistic prayer said. The prayer for deliverance from eternal damnation is from Pope Gregory the Great himself.

Now, by the time of Gregory the prayer was largely solidified and there weren't many changes to it after that, with a couple of minor exceptions. Apparently in the 8th century a commemoration for the dead was added to the prayer. Some have attributed this to the British scholar Alcuin of York, but there's debate about that and some doubts have been raised. But what is indubitable is that in the 20th century, one more Pope changed the Roman canon, and that was Pope St. John XXIII. He is the one who in 1962 added the name of St. Joseph to the Roman Canon. The line “and blessed Joseph, her Spouse” was added in 1962 by Pope St. John XXIII. So you can see in short, that the Roman Canon, the Eucharistic Prayer, far from being composed by Christ himself, much less composed entirely by St. Peter, as I've heard some people say, who clearly haven't studied this in any depth, is actually a combination of elements composed by unknown authors, like its initial scholastic author, various popes that we know and traditions of the Church. And this composite character of the Eucharistic Prayer is actually something taught by the Church herself.

So in the Council Trent in the 16th century, there was a decree on the Mass, and if you read the canons and decrees of the Council of Trent, it actually says this about the Roman Canon in 1562 AD:

That this sacrifice might be worthily and reverently offered and received, the Catholic Church many centuries ago instituted the sacred canon. It is so free from all error that it contains nothing that does not savor strongly of holiness



and piety and nothing that does not raise to God the minds of those who offer. *For it is made up of the words of our Lord himself,*

Think here of the words of consecration, words of institution.

*of apostolic traditions,*

Think here of the unknown contributions of authors in the early Church.

*and of devout instructions of the holy pontiffs.<sup>7</sup>*

That means the various compositions of the Pope. So that's from the Council of Trent and the canons and decrees on the Mass, Chapter 4. And it just goes to show how the Roman Canon is this beautiful mosaic composed of all these pieces from tradition, from the words of Jesus and the teachings of the popes of the Roman Church. It's truly, truly a precious, precious prayer and a precious piece of Eucharistic theology.

Alright, with that in mind, what's happening mystically? So when we come to Mass and the Roman Canon is prayed, what is happening mystically at that part of the Mass? I want to end by just making a few brief points for the kind of spirituality of Eucharistic Prayer I, the spirituality of the Roman Canon. The first one is the significance of the martyrs, right? This prayer is not just a prayer of the Church, it is the prayer in communion with the martyrs, especially the martyrs of the Roman Church, the early popes who were martyrs and the saints of North Africa and Rome. And St. Augustine has a beautiful reflection on the role of the martyrs in the Eucharistic liturgy when he says this:

Church custom has it that at the place *where the names of the martyrs are recited at God's altar, we don't pray for them,* while we do pray for the other departed brothers and sisters who are remembered there. It is insulting, I

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<sup>7</sup> Council of Trent, Doctrines and Canons on the Sacrifice of the Mass (17 September, 1562), Chapter 4. In Denzinger, *Compendium of Creeds*, no. 1745.

mean, to pray for martyrs, *to whose prayer we ought rather to commend ourselves*. They have tackled sin, after all, to the point of shedding their blood.<sup>8</sup>

So Augustine's making clear here to anyone who might mistakenly think we're praying for these martyrs if they hear their names at Mass. He says, “no, no, no, We mention the dead, like the faithful departed, we pray for them and intercede for them. But when it comes to the martyrs, we're asking them to pray for us because they've already offered the ultimate sacrifice, which is the shedding of their blood.” So in this case, it would be especially fitting, in my opinion, for the Roman Canon to be prayed on the feast of a martyr, especially a Roman martyr, but any one of the Apostles or any one of these martyrs because it is such a martyrological prayer, like it's very focused on the merits and intercessory prayers of those who have paid the ultimate price before us, the witnesses to Christ known as the martyrs.

A second aspect of the mysticism of Eucharistic Prayer I is one of my favorites, and it has to do with the actual letters of the prayer itself. So if you look at ancient, medieval, and even early modern copies of the Roman Sacramentary or the Roman Missal, one of the things you're going to notice is that the first line of the Roman Canon proper is the letter T, *Te igitur* in Latin. And that T will often be decorated in Missals in the shape of a cross and tied to an image of the crucifix as a kind of mystical symbolism of the fact that at this point, once you're entering into the Eucharistic Prayer, you really are coming to Calvary, right, and entering into the mystery of the Cross. So for example, if you look at the Missal of the Council of Trent, I actually have a facsimile here of the 1570 *Missale Romanum*, that was published in the wake of the Council of Trent. If you turn to the order of Mass in the middle, where the Eucharistic prayer is, you'll actually see here as an image, the T of *Te igitur* is expanded and then on the facing page there is an image of the crucifix, right? And since medieval times, that T and that image of the cross were actually meant to stimulate the priest and help him realize I'm focusing now, I'm entering into Calvary when I pray this prayer. You don't hav ego take my word for it, you can actually look at what William Durand writes in his 13th century

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<sup>8</sup> Augustine, *Sermon* 159. In Saint Augustine, *Sermons III/5 (148-183)* (trans. Edmund Hill, O.P.; Works of Saint Augustine III/5; Hyde Park, N.Y.: New City Press, 1992), 121.

commentary on the Mass. This is what he says about the mystical T at the beginning of the prayer and the cross of Christ:

Now it has happened, by God's permission, without human industry having done anything for it, that the Canon begins with the letter T, which is called in Hebrew *thau*. *This letter represents and expresses by its form the figure and the mystery of the Cross*; which is why the Lord said, by the mouth of Ezekiel, "Go through the midst of the city, through the midst of Jerusalem: and mark Thou upon the foreheads of the men that sigh, and mourn for all the abominations that are committed in the midst thereof" [Ezek 9:4 Vulgate],

That's Ezekiel 9:4. It's from the Latin Vulgate; it's an English translation. But what it's actually saying is mark a Tau on their foreheads and in ancient Hebrew the form of the Tau was a long vertical line and a short horizontal. It was the sign of a cross. The T is shaped like a cross. Durand continues. The reason this was done is:

because it was in the Passion of Christ that all these things have been accomplished and have the efficacy of the Cross. *However, in some books, we represent the majesty of the Father and also the image of Jesus crucified, so that the priest has some representation of Him whom he invokes and to whom he speaks these words, "We, therefore," etc., and let him contemplate with the eyes of the heart the Passion that is represented in the book.*<sup>9</sup>

So what he's basically saying is if you look at the Missal, both the letter T, which in the Old Testament is the sign of the cross on the forehead, and the image of the crucifix are meant to help the priests who is saying the Mass remember that once he enters into the Canon, he's entering the Holy of Holies, and he is at the foot of Calvary. Which, by the way, is one of the reasons I really love this edition of the Roman Missal that I've been teaching out of here, published by Catholic Book Publishing, because if you turn to its edition of the Eucharistic Prayer I you see an illuminated T. Again, the T is expanded to call your attention to that first letter,

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<sup>9</sup> Durandus, *Rationale of the Divine Offices*, 4.35.11.

which just by coincidence in English is the same as in Latin. "To you, therefore", you have a T both in Latin and in English. And then there's a beautiful image of Calvary, of the crucifix, at the beginning of Eucharistic Prayer I. So this is a very ancient custom of highlighting the T and linking it with the image of the crucifix that gives you the mysticism of the Roman Canon. And with that in mind, I just would end by pointing out that we've only scratched the surface of the theological richness and inexhaustible meaning that Pope Benedict talks about with each of these Eucharistic prayers. But this one in particular, Eucharistic Prayer I, the Roman Canon, is a holy, venerable, ancient and robust theology of the Eucharist as a whole. So you could actually do a study just working through each line of this prayer and draw out of it this beautiful, rich theology of the Holy Mass. But above all, I think for me at least, it points us to the fact that when we've entered in to the Eucharistic Prayer, as the *Te igitur* says, as the illumination of the T shows, and as the custom of putting that crucifix at the beginning of Eucharistic Prayer I reveals, we are entering into the mystery of Calvary.