

The Preface and the Sanctus

With the completion of the Offertory, we now come to what Pope Benedict XVI referred to as “the centre and the summit” of the Mass, and that is the Eucharistic Prayer. So in order to illustrate the importance of the Eucharistic Prayer, if you think of the Mass, the Eucharistic Liturgy, as the source and summit of the Christian life, you can think of the Eucharistic Prayer within the Mass as the summit of the Mass itself. So it's almost impossible to overstate just how important this part of the Liturgy of the Eucharist is. So when we're referring to the Eucharistic prayer in the Mass, what exactly are we referring to?

The key here to recognizing the beginning of the Eucharistic Prayer is that every time the Eucharistic Prayer is said, the priest is going to say the greeting similar to what he said at the beginning, and he'll say at the end of Mass, "The Lord be with you" and the people respond "and with your Spirit." And then he will say “lift up your hearts” and the people reply, "we lift them up to the Lord." That exhortation to lift up your hearts is sometimes called the Preface of the Preface. It's the very beginning of the Eucharistic Prayer, and it's going to begin a whole series of prayers, such as the particular preface which is going to be prayed by the priest to introduce that particular Mass. There'll be the "Holy, Holy, Holy," and our response to that where we sing the song of the angels, there's going to be the institution narrative, what we often call the words of consecration, where the priests will recite the words that Jesus said at the Last Supper. "This is my body... This is my blood." And then elevate the consecrated host and the consecrated chalice. The Eucharistic prayer is going to consist of a memorial where we remember the passion, death, and resurrection of Christ, as well as various intercessions and other prayers that will culminate ultimately in a final doxology, "Through Him, with Him and in Him, in the unity of the Holy Spirit, all glory and honor is yours, almighty Father, for ever and ever.” And then it ends with the people saying, “Amen”, the great Amen that brings this prayer to its close.

So at every Mass you will have a Eucharistic prayer that begins with the "lift up your hearts," that dialogue between the priest and the people, and then ends with the doxology, "through him, with him and in him..." and concludes with the "Amen" of the people. So with just that basic idea of what the Eucharistic Prayer is

in mind, I listen to the words of Pope Benedict XVI about the importance of the Eucharistic Prayer. He says in his Apostolic Exhortation, *Sacrament of Charity*:

The Eucharistic Prayer is “the centre and summit of the entire celebration” [GIRM no. 78]. Its importance deserves to be adequately emphasized. The different Eucharistic Prayers contained in the Missal have been handed down to us by 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. (Benedict XVI, Sacramentum Caritatis no. 48)

So that's what I want to try to do in this series of videos where we're going to look at the theological depth and the inexhaustible riches — and it really is amazing — of the Eucharistic Prayers. In order to do that in a way that's clear here, I want to focus first on the parts of the Eucharistic prayer that stay the same, and then once we've looked at those, like the "Holy, holy, Holy" or the words of consecration, once we've looked at those and looked at where they come from in Scripture and Tradition, then we'll take some time to look at each of the four major Eucharistic Prayers 1, 2, 3 and 4 and their own roots in Scripture and in the Church's tradition. Now before we get into those common elements of the Eucharistic Prayer, just a brief historical note might be helpful on the names of the Eucharistic Prayer, because sometimes when people are talking about it, they're going to use different names to refer to the same thing.

For example, I've been using the term Eucharistic Prayer. This term goes all the way back to the early Church. It comes from the Greek word *eucharistia*, which means thanksgiving. So if you look at any one of the Eucharistic Prayers, they are very much going to be devoted to giving thanks to the Father for what he has done through the Son in the power of the Holy Spirit. There's going to be a kind of Trinitarian shape to the Eucharistic Prayer. So they will frequently be called the Thanksgiving Prayers or Eucharistic Prayers. Other names for the Eucharistic Prayer give us a little window into its character, but different aspects of the mystery, or kind of facets of the diamond. Sometimes writers will refer to the Eucharistic Prayer as the Canon. This call this comes from the Greek word *kanon*, which means a rule or a measure. In other words, the Eucharistic Prayer is the

norm. It's like the prayer of prayers by which all other prayers are measured. Also, that word canon came to be applied to the Eucharistic prayer once the prayer had taken on a set form which all priests were to follow. It took several centuries to get to that point. Normally it's associated with the solidification of the prayer at the time of Pope St. Gregory the Great in the 6th century, but the word Canon emphasizes that the Eucharistic Prayer isn't just any prayer, it's a norm. It's a rule to be followed by priests everywhere.

A third name for the Eucharistic Prayer is the anaphora. You might hear me slip and sometimes say the anaphora instead of the Eucharistic Prayer. Anaphora is just a Greek word. It comes from a Greek term *ana-pherein*, which means to bear up or to offer up. So using the term anaphora emphasizes the sacrificial nature of the Eucharistic Prayer, that this is a prayer that's prayed when the bread and the wine are being offered up and consecrated to become the body, blood, soul, and divinity of Christ. Finally, sometimes you'll see some writers just refer to the Eucharistic Prayer as the Prayer, the *prex*, because it is kind of the prayer par excellence, the greatest of all prayers.

So that gives you an idea of some of the names of the prayer itself. In this video now, what I want to focus on is the beginning of the Eucharistic Prayer, with the particular attention to the opening dialogue between the priest and the people, where he invites them to lift up their hearts. This is sometimes called the preface of the preface. It is the very beginning of the Eucharist Prayer. And then the song, the chant, the “:Holy Holy, Holy”, sometimes known as the Sanctus, which is Latin for Holy, that really leads us into the heart of the Eucharistic Prayer itself. So every time you go to Mass, no matter what Eucharistic prayer is said, no matter what form it might take, what season it might be, these two elements are going to be present. So the beginning, the preface here, the priest will say this:

Priest: *The Lord be with you.*
People: *And with your spirit.*
Priest: *Lift up your hearts.*
People: *We lift them up to the Lord.*
Priest: *Let us give thanks to the Lord our God.*
People: *It is right and just.*

And just after the people say "it is right and just", then the priest will begin to pray a particular prayer where he'll say "It is truly right and just, our duty and our salvation, always and everywhere to give you thanks..." And he will usually give some kind of very particular prayer that's tied to that Mass. This is known as the proper preface, and this is one of the parts of Liturgy of the Eucharist, of the Eucharistic Prayer, where there's the most variation. Going all the way back to ancient times, one of the distinctive characteristics of the Roman Mass is that we have all these variable prefaces, right? So some ancient Sacramentaries will have over 200 different prefaces, others will have, you know, over 50. The Tridentine Missal has about 11. So they can be added and subtracted. The contemporary Roman Missal has about 50 prefaces. So there are lots of variations at this point in the liturgy.

But once the priest is done with that preface, then we're all going to sing the "Holy, Holy, Holy", which is the same at every single Mass. And that chant says this:

Holy, Holy, Holy
Lord God of hosts.
Heaven and earth are full of your glory.
Hosanna in the highest.
Blessed is he who comes
in the name of the Lord.
Hosanna in the highest.
(Roman Missal, Order of Mass, no. 31)

And I should point out here that one of the things you'll notice here when we get to the Sanctus is, even in the English Missal, like the contemporary Roman Missal, you not only have the English of the Holy, Holy, Holy, but alongside it you will have in the official edition, the Latin as well:

Sanctus, Sanctus, Sanctus
Dominus Deus Sabaoth.
Pleni sunt caeli et terra gloria tua.
Hosanna in excelsis.

Benedictus qui venit in nomine Domini.
Hosanna in excelsis.

So it can be done either in English or in Latin. You may notice both in the liturgy. So the question these two parts of the Mass put before us, the dialogue at the beginning, the preface of the preface, and the Holy, Holy, Holy, the questions they raise are why do we do this at every single Mass? Why is this the entryway into the Eucharistic Prayer? And where do these parts of the Mass come from, both in the Bible and in ancient tradition, both Jewish and Catholic tradition. So let's just walk through those together.

When it comes to the Scriptural roots of the beginning of the Eucharistic Prayer, there are several passages in the Old and New Testaments that are the inspiration, that provide the words for this part of the prayer. For example, the greeting of the priest, "The Lord be with you", is actually an ancient Israelite and ancient Jewish greeting that goes all the way back to the book of Ruth. So in the book of Ruth 2:4, Boaz, who is one of the ancestors of King David, is coming from Bethlehem, and he sees these men reaping in the fields, and he says to them, "the Lord be with you." And the Latin of that is *Dominus vobiscum*. It's the exact term for the words that we use in the liturgy. And then of course we reply to that greeting "and with your spirit." And that's a little bit of an odd thing to say. Maybe you've wondered why do we say that. You might even remember in an older translation of the Mass we used "and also with you", which is a little more common, but the literal translation in Latin is "and with your spirit."

Well, those words are also from Scripture. They're not from the Old Testament, though, they're from the New Testament. They're from the writings of St. Paul in his letter to Timothy, his second letter to Timothy, he actually ends the letter with the words "the Lord be with your spirit" as he's writing to Timothy. And that greeting that he gives, that final greeting is a biblical expression, but it's interesting because it actually is building on something he said earlier to Timothy, which points to Timothy's identity as an ordained minister. So Timothy is a young, traditionally he's regarded as a young Bishop who has been ordained to ministry. So St. Paul begins his letter with these words:

I remind you to rekindle *the gift of God* that is within you through the laying on of my hands; for God did not give us a *spirit* (Latin *spiritum*) of timidity but a *spirit of power* and love and self-control...

That's at the beginning. Then he ends it:

The Lord *be with your spirit* (Latin *cum spiritu tuo*). (2 Timothy 4:22, Vulgate)¹

So what is the Spirit particularly that Paul is Speaking of? He's talking about the gift of the spirit that Timothy received when he had hands laid on him and he was being ordained as a minister of the Gospel. So effectively what the Church is doing in this moment in the Mass is taking the words of Boaz to the people, “the Lord be with you”, and then the words of St. Paul to the ordained figure of St. Timothy, “the Lord be with your spirit” and putting them on the lips of the priest and the people to open this dialogue. That's not the only thing from the Bible though. The language of lifting up our hearts is also biblical. In the book of Lamentations 3, it says:

Let us lift up our hearts (Latin *levemus corda*) and hands
to God in heaven (Latin *ad Dominum in caelos*). (Lamentations 3:41, Vulgate)

So the lifting of hands in ancient Judaism was a basic common posture for prayer, right? So the lifting of the hands externally would signify the lifting up of the heart to God in prayer. So the Church takes this scripture and again puts it on our lips in the Mass, and the priest invites the people to "lift up their hearts" in the Eucharistic Prayer. So this is going to be a very focused and intentional act of prayer in the very heart of the liturgy. The next element of the beginning of the Eucharistic Prayer that is deeply biblical is the Holy, Holy, Holy itself. In my experience, many

¹ 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.

people are familiar with where this passage comes from. It's a quotation from the book of Isaiah and Isaiah's vision of the heavenly temple and the heavenly song of the seraphim, the angels. But a lot of times people don't go back and look at it in context. So I want to look at it in a little more detail because there's going to be a real sense in which if you don't understand where the Holy, Holy, Holy comes from in the Bible, you're not going to understand how it's functioning in the Eucharistic Prayer. So let's just take a few moments to look back. Isaiah 6 is where the Holy Holy Holy comes from and it's an account of Isaiah having a vision in which he's caught up into the heavenly presence of God, into the heavenly sanctuary and he hears a song being sung. And this is what Isaiah tells us:

I saw the LORD sitting upon a throne, high and lifted up; and his train [vestments] filled the temple. Above him stood the seraphim; each had six wings: with two he covered his face, and with two he covered his feet, and with two he flew. And one called to another and said: "Holy, holy, holy is the LORD of hosts;

[Hebrew, qadosh, qadosh, qadosh, YHWH Tzeba'oth; Greek, hagios, hagios, hagios, kyrios sabaoth;

Latin Sanctus, Sanctus, Sanctus, Dominus exercituum]

the whole earth is full of his glory." And the foundations of the thresholds shook at the voice of him who called, and *the house was filled with smoke [incense]*. And I said: "Woe is me! For I am lost; for I am a man of unclean lips, and I dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips; for my eyes have seen the King, the LORD of hosts!" *Then flew one of the seraphim to me, having in his hand a burning coal which he had taken with tongs from the altar. And he touched my mouth, and said: "Behold, this has touched your lips; your guilt is taken away, and your sin forgiven."* (Isaiah 6:1-7)

Okay, notice a few elements about this very important passage. Number one, when Isaiah has the vision, he enters into the heavenly temple. He's not talking about the temple on earth when he says his train filled the temple. He means the temple in heaven. Second, when he hears the song and the Holy, Holy, Holy. It's not just the song of anyone, it's the song of the Seraphim. The Seraphim are the highest of the angelic creatures in the heavenly court. Their name literally in Hebrew means the

burning ones, right? So just as the Bible describes God as a consuming fire, so too the Seraphim are so close to God that their very nature is fire. They are the burning ones. Third, they're singing this chant, "Holy, Holy, Holy is the Lord of hosts." And in Hebrew, the term there is a trifold repetition, "*qadosh, qadosh, qadosh*. The Lord *Tzeba'oth*." *Qadosh* is the just the Hebrew word for holy. It means set apart. And in Hebrew if you want to say something is the most, if you want to use a superlative, you say it three times. In English we can say something is the greatest, as an adjective, but in Hebrew you can't do that. You have to say it three times to say it's the greatest. So *qadosh, qadosh, qadosh* means the most Holy... "is the Lord of hosts." And that term hosts, *Tzeba'oth*, actually means the angelic hosts. So this song is specifically angelic in what it's describing. It's describing and giving praise to the God of the angels and saying that he is the most holy. He is the Lord of all the hosts of angels. And that Hebrew term *qadosh* is going to get translated into Latin as Sanctus, holy, set apart. "*Sanctus Sanctus, Sanctus, Dominus Deus Sabaoth*. Lord God of Hosts, *Sabaoth*. So even in the Latin in the Missal we actually use a Hebrew word there when we call Him the God of Hosts. It's a proper name. So it's fitting that it's in Hebrew.

And then finally, you'll notice Isaiah's reaction to hearing this hymn of the Holy, Holy, Holy is fear and awe, because he knows he's a sinful person. He's a sinful man, and yet he's been brought into the holy place. He's been brought into the inner sanctum, not just of the earthly temple, but of the heavenly temple. And so he says, "Woe is me!" I'm undone, right? I'm a sinful person. I have sinful lips. I live in the midst of a people of sinful lips, right? We have spoken words that are sinful. And therefore the angel comes and brings a coal of fire from the altar of incense, which also tells you he is in the Temple. The incense tells you you are in the presence of God. And he puts the coal on his lips to cleanse him of his sin, to purify him so that he can enter into the presence of the Lord. So, even before you look at the living tradition of the Church, you can tell that by singing the Holy, Holy, Holy, the Church is signaling to us in the Eucharistic Prayer that we are entering in a very particular way, a very sacred way, into God's presence. We are entering into the inner sanctum. We are not on earth in a sense anymore. We are being caught up like Isaiah into the heavenly temple, into the heavenly worship, into the heavenly hymns of the angels praising the God of the angels through the Sanctus, Sanctus, Sanctus; the Holy, Holy, Holy.

But, that is not the only hymn we sing. There is one more Biblical allusion. Again, the Eucharist Prayer is like a tapestry, just woven of all these threads of Scriptural allusions. And this last one is a different song. This is a song not that is being sung in heaven, but that is being sung on earth, because we will say:

Blessed is he who comes
in the name of the Lord.

That part of the hymn, that part of the song is not from the angels in heaven. It is from the crowds in Jerusalem. So if you remember in the Gospels, on Palm Sunday, when Jesus comes to the city of Jerusalem, Matthew 21:9 tells us that:

And the crowds that went before him and that followed him shouted,
“*Hosanna to the Son of David! Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord! Hosanna in the highest!* (Matthew 21:9)

So the crowds are basically chanting the Psalms. This is a quotation from Psalm 118. And in that Psalm, they are welcoming the king, who is about to come into Jerusalem to offer sacrifice. So what the Church is doing here is she is placing both on our lips the song of the angels in heaven and the chants of the crowds in Jerusalem as they welcome Jesus into the Temple. So obviously there is a lot going on, this is a very Scripturally rich moment at the beginning of the Eucharist Prayer in both the Preface and the Sanctus. So that is where they come from in Scripture.

What about Tradition? Well, if you look at the tradition of the Roman liturgy, and not just the Roman liturgy, but the Eastern liturgies as well, the Preface and the Holy, Holy, Holy are two of the most ancient elements in the Mass, two of the most ancient elements of Eucharistic Liturgy, the Divine Liturgy in the East and the West. So with regard to the Mass, according to one ancient Roman tradition, from about the 6th century, it was actually Pope Sixtus I who, in the 2nd century, added the hymn of the angels, the Sanctus, Sanctus, Sanctus to the Roman Liturgy in the early Church. So it says in the *Liber Pontificalis*, the Book of Roman Popes, that:

Sixtus [ca. 117-ca. 127], born in Rome, [...] decreed that within the celebration [of Mass] *the people sing*—with the priest beginning—*the “Sanctus, sanctus, sanctus Dominus Deus Sabaoth,”* etc.²

So that is all the way back in the 2nd century. What about the dialogue between the priest and people?

The Lord be with you.
And with your spirit.
Lift up your hearts.
We lift them up to the Lord.

That dialogue, that preface of the preface is actually also one of the most ancient and widespread parts of the Eucharistic Liturgy. You find it not only alluded to in passing by Clement, who was one of the early Popes, in his Letter to the Corinthians, but Tertullian in North Africa, Athanasius, a great saint in Alexandria, as well as St. Cyril of Jerusalem, who was bishop in Jerusalem in the 4th century AD. All of them refer to this dialogue where the priest will invite the people to “Lift up your hearts.” And the people will say “We lift them up to the Lord.” And the priest will say “Let us give thanks to the Lord.” And the people will say “It is right and just.” One example of this, perhaps the most famous example, is from a document known as the *Apostolic Tradition*. The *Apostolic Tradition* was known before the 20th century, but actual copies of it were discovered in the 20th century. And many scholars in the 20th century argue for its attribution to Hippolytus, who was a priest of Rome and a saint. He’s in the Roman calendar as St. Hippolytus. This document, the *Apostolic Tradition*, was long regarded as one of the earliest witnesses to the Eucharistic Prayer that we possess. And some scholars — not all, there is some debate about this — attribute it to St. Hippolytus as a description of what the Roman liturgy looked like in about the 3rd century. So in this ancient description of the Eucharistic Prayer from the *Apostolic Tradition*, I want you to read this. And if this is a description of the Roman liturgy in the 3rd century, you can see how ancient the preface is when it says:

² *Liber Pontificalis* 8.1, 2. In Johnson, *Worship in the Early Church*, 4:54.

The deacons then present him [the bishop] with the offering, and he, imposing his hand upon it with the whole presbytery, gives thanks together with the whole presbytery as he says,

“The Lord be with you.”

And all say, “And with your spirit.”

“Lift up your hearts.”

“We lift them up to the Lord.”

“Let us give thanks to the Lord.”

“It is right and just.”³

So you can see there a very ancient witness to almost word for word what we do in the Roman liturgy at the very beginning of the Eucharistic Prayer. And sure enough, this is going to continue to develop over time. If we look at early descriptions of the papal mass, *Order Romanus I*, I've mentioned it in other videos, a 7th-century description of Mass with the Pope says the same thing. It describes the Holy, Holy, Holy as a part of the Eucharistic Prayer, as the kind of doorway, so to speak, into the Canon, the Roman Canon of the Eucharistic Prayer. So it just says this:

The regionary subdeacons, after the offertory is finished, *go behind the altar, looking at the pope...*

So it's interesting that the altar here is separate from the wall and the Pope is facing the congregation. The deacons are facing the Pope. They're facing one another. And it says:

...standing upright until they begin to chant the angelic hymn, that is the *Sanctus, Sanctus, Sanctus*. When they have finished it, the pope alone rises and begins the Canon.⁴

³ Hippolytus of Rome, *Apostolic Tradition*, 4. In Johnson, *Worship in the Early Church*, 1:201.

⁴ *Ordo Romanus I*, no. 87-88. In Romano, *Liturgy and Society in Early Medieval Rome*, 242-43.

So this is the ancient Roman term for the Eucharistic prayer, that's going to start right after the Sanctus is completed. So that just gives you an example. This is a very ancient, very holy part of the Eucharistic prayer. Notice there that it says he begins the Canon. This is going to be one of those elements that there's some diversity about. Some ancient writers will talk about the Canon as beginning with the dialogue, "The Lord be with you. And with your spirit. Lift up your hearts." Others will place it after the Holy, Holy, Holy when the priest will begin to say these words:

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

And that's an example of what's going on here in the description of the Roman Mass in the 7th century. By this point, the Canon is being described as beginning after the Holy, Holy, Holy with the words of the priest, in this case, the Pope himself. So that's just a little tiny sliver of the history of the beginning of the Eucharistic Prayer, where it comes from in the Bible, and then also where it comes from in tradition.

But now we can ask ourselves to step back for a minute and say, okay, what's happening mystically here at this point in the Mass? What's invisibly taking place when we begin the dialogue at the opening of the Eucharistic Prayer and also when we sing the hymn of not just the Holy, Holy, Holy, but also the "Blessed is He who comes in the name of the Lord. Hosanna in the highest." What's happening at this moment in the Mass? And if you look at various Church Fathers and ecclesiastical writers, they're going to have a lot to say about the beginning of the Eucharistic Prayer. So here I just want to point out a few insights from the tradition on what's happening mystically at this moment. So, if we go all the way back to the 3rd century, St. Cyprian of Carthage, lived in North Africa, he commented on the invitation to lift up our hearts at the beginning of the Eucharistic Prayer with these words. He said this:

Beloved, when we stand for prayer, we ought to be watchful and diligent in praying with all our being. May every bodily and worldly thought depart; may the soul, when you are at prayer, think only of the object of your prayer.

This is why the priest before the [eucharistic] prayer prepares the minds of the brethren by a preface as he says, "Lift up your hearts" so that when the people respond, "We lift them up to the Lord," they might be reminded that they should think of nothing other than the Lord...⁵

So notice, what St. Cyprian is saying here is that at the beginning of the Eucharistic Prayer, with the preface, that invitation to lift up your hearts is really a direct invitation to focus, to make the prayer of this part of the Mass very focused and very intent, and to leave behind the things of the earth, and to focus our hearts on the things of heaven; to help us detach, in a certain sense, from the visible creation and attach to the invisible mysteries that our happening in the midst of the Eucharist, especially with the Eucharistic prayer. To detach our hearts from the world and to attach them to God. So if there's any part of the Mass where we should be paying attention and not be distracted, it's with the preface, it's with the beginning of the Eucharistic Prayer. And you can also see that in ancient times, people got distracted at Mass just like they do today. So St. Cyprian is having to remind us to focus our hearts and think of nothing worldly at this part of the Mass above all.

A second insight to what's happening mystically here comes from St. John Chrysostom. His name means "golden mouth" in Greek, Chrysostom, and you can actually hear that here with a brief quote where he's describing the Holy, Holy, Holy in the Eastern liturgies. So he's not celebrating the Roman Mass, but since this is part of the Eastern liturgy, I had to share it as well. He says this about the hymn:

The seraphim above have resounded the hymn of the three-fold Holy; here below the crowd of people singing the same hymn! Those in heaven and those on earth form one festive assembly... From on high comes the rhythm of its singing; touched by the Trinity as by a bow, it resounds with a pleasing and joyful song, with an angelic melody, with an uninterrupted symphony.⁶

⁵ Cyprian of Carthage, *On the Lord's Prayer*, 31. In Johnson, *Worship in the Early Church*, 1:153. The last sentence of this translation is from Tertullian, Cyprian, and Origen, *On the Lord's Prayer* (Popular Patristics 29; trans. Alistair Stewart-Sykes; Crestwood, N.Y.: St Vladimir's Seminary Press, 2004), 88.

⁶ John Chrysostom, *Commentary on Isaiah*, Homily 1. In Johnson, *Worship in the Early Church*, 2:176.

Wow, that's awesome. So you can see there, St. John Chrysostom is, a couple things, presuming that the Holy, Holy, Holy isn't just going to be recited, but that it's going to be sung. Now the Church allows both. You can just recite the Holy, Holy, Holy, like a daily mass. But ideally it should be sung because at this moment in the liturgy we really are taking not just the words of the angels on our lips, but singing the song of the angels. It's an angelic hymn to the Most Holy Trinity, so that in a sense, heaven and earth are united at this moment, with the Sanctus in the Mass. Another element of it that's really interesting there is he says that "from on high comes the rhythm of its singing." And a priest friend of mine I was speaking to, who is an expert in liturgy, pointed this out to me. That one of the reasons we chant the Holy, Holy, Holy, and one of the features of what we call Gregorian chant is the fact that it doesn't have a time signature like ordinary music, right? In a sense, it is timeless. The lack of a time signature with, you know, like 4/4 or 2/4, like those beats, with chant, where the notes themselves give the rhythm to the to the song, is a kind of almost like an earthly symbol of the heavenly liturgy, which is beyond time or above time. So it gives it this heavenly quality to chant the prayers of the Mass and to sing, in a sense, with the angels, with the very song that they are singing in heavenly worship. It is truly an angelic melody, a symphony of heaven and earth coming together. So the Holy, Holy, Holy, the Sanctus, should be one of the most beautiful moments in the liturgy that really helps us to detach our hearts from the world and attach them to God, precisely through singing this angelic hymn to the Most Holy Trinity. Beautiful, beautiful meditation there.

However, it's important to note that it in the Mass, it's not just that we are being caught up into heaven, it's also the case that heaven is coming down to earth. So we're not only celebrating the heavenly dimension of the Eucharist, we're also celebrating the earthly mystery of the Incarnation. So in a medieval commentary on the liturgy that I've mentioned elsewhere, by Amalar of Metz, he actually says that at this moment in liturgy, not only are we being caught up with the angels, but we're also, in a sense, being brought back in time to be with the crowds and welcoming Christ into Jerusalem. Listen to his words, Amalar says:

After he had received the prayers of the singers, [Christ] entered Jerusalem and the Lord's temple, where the altar was, and there he presented himself to

God the Father for his coming sacrifice... After the hymn, Sanctus, sanctus, sanctus has begun, those who stand behind and those who stand facing the celebrant...

Again, he's describing the 9th century with the altar separate from the wall, where you actually have the ministers facing one another on either side of the altar

[they] bow, namely to venerate the divine majesty and the Lord's incarnation, which were announced by the song of the angels and the crowds. *The choir of the angels, by saying: "Holy, holy, holy, Lord God of Sabaoth," announces the divine majesty; the harmony of the crowds announces the Lord's incarnation, by saying, "Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord, Hosanna in the highest."*⁷

So in other words, the two parts of this hymn, the "Holy, Holy, Holy", and the "Blessed is he who comes in the name of Lord", announced two aspects of the mystery that's being celebrated. The divinity of Christ, right, who's praised by the angels in heaven for all eternity, and the humanity of Christ, who is praised by the crowds in Jerusalem. And just like the crowds in Jerusalem welcomed Jesus into the city at the very week where he was going up to the altar of the Cross, to offer sacrifice of Calvary, so now at this moment in the Mass, at the very beginning of the Eucharistic Prayer, with the hymn of the Sanctus and our prayer, "blessed is He who comes in the name of the Lord", we are welcoming Christ, who's going to come down from heaven onto the altar of the Holy Mass and offer himself to the Father in the unbloody sacrifice of the Eucharist. So this moment is so rich, it's so powerful in the Eucharistic prayer. It's fitting that every time the Eucharistic Prayer is offered that we sing the hymn of the angels and the crowds in Jerusalem.

And in fact, one last comment from a commentator in the Middle Ages, William Durand, in his very famous 13th century explanation of the Mass, says of the Sanctus. He says that basically the Holy, Holy, Holy is like the doorway into the inner sanctuary of the Tabernacle. In effect, by opening the Eucharistic Prayer with

⁷Amalar, *On the Liturgy*, 3.19.14, 20. In Amalar of Metz, *On the Liturgy* (2 vols.; trans. Eric Knibbs; Dumbarton Oaks Medieval Library 36; Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2014), 2:117, 121, 147.

the Sanctus, we are shifting in Mass from the outer court, so to speak, of the Temple, and entering into the inner sanctum known as the Holy of Holies. Listen to Duran's statement. He says this:

Once the temple was divided into two parts separated by a veil. The first part was called the Holy [Place]..., and the second (or inner) the Holy of Holies... *All that take place during the service of the Mass before the Secret [= the Prayer over the Offerings] is somehow in the first part of the sacred edifice, but what takes place during the Secret [=the Eucharistic Prayer] is in the Holy of Holies.*⁸

So what Durand is saying here, and what I think would be helpful for us to keep in mind, is that this part of the Mass, in a sense, mystically we're moving from the Outer Court into the Holy of Holies. So that the Preface and the Sanctus at the beginning of every Eucharistic Prayer is kind of like pulling back the veil so that we can enter into the Tabernacle, enter into the place of sacrifice, enter into the inner sanctum, where Christ will offer himself to the Father on the altar of the Eucharist.

⁸ Durandus, *Rationale of the Divine Offices*, 4.1.13. In Guillaume Durandus, *Rationale Divinorum Officiorum*, 3:5.