

Preface Dialogue

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The eucharistic prayer of every mass begins with a three-part dialogue between the priest and the people. He issues a greeting, urging them to lift their hearts and give thanks. The people affirm each phrase. This dialogue entered the liturgy by the third or fourth century to introduce the prayer that evolved into Eucharistic Prayer II. It solemnly begins the church's most solemn prayer.

You also hear a phrase like "The Lord be with you" at the start of Mass, before the Gospel, and in the preparation for communion. That formula probably originated in the preface dialogue and then entered broader usage to alert worshipers that something important was about to happen. Our response at this point in the Eucharistic Prayer is presently "And also with you." A more accurate translation is "And with your spirit."

In the second part of the dialogue, the priest invites the people to lift up their hearts. They respond, "We lift them up to the Lord." An early English translation used the past tense: "We have lifted them up to the Lord," but people are to do this action right now. A literal translation of the Latin would be more like, "We hold them before the Lord." The dialogue asks us to become wholly present to God to prepare for what follows.

The priest then gives this explicit direction: "Let us give thanks to the Lord our God." During the Eucharistic prayer, the consecration will take place, and people will pause for adoration. But its overall purpose is to give thanks to God. For many years people responded, "It is right to give him thanks and praise," but the historical response uses fewer words: "It is right and just." In the dialogue, priest and people inaugurate the Eucharistic prayer, they lift their hearts to God, and they begin to do what it is right to do: give thanks.

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