



Archdiocese of New York + 2011

EUCCHARISTIC PRAYER ONE -THE ROMAN CANON: STRUCTURE AND MEANING

The Origins and Significance of the Roman Canon (Eucharistic Prayer One): The Roman Canon holds a special place in the Church of the West, the Roman Church. With origins that reach as far back as the 4th century a.d., this Eucharistic Prayer ultimately became the only Eucharistic Prayer used in the celebration of Mass in the Western Church. In this practice we whose roots lie in the Church of Rome differ from Eastern Catholics who throughout their history, have made use of a variety of Canons, suited to different celebrations.

In the early centuries of Church history the canons used in East and West were interconnected; interwoven in them were strands drawn from one another. However, when Latin replaced Greek as the language of the Church and the Latin literary style replaced that of the Greeks, the Roman Canon further developed as a prayer very Latin in its style, employing the artistic language which was characteristic of the highest forms of Roman oratory. The language of the Roman Canon, therefore, is formal with dignified cadences intended to convey the majesty and holiness of the action taking place.

Structure of the Roman Canon: In structure the Roman Canon differs from the other Canons in use since the Second Vatican Council. It has been described as totally centered on the Institution Narrative and Consecration with the other segments of the Canon arranged in mirror style before and after these two central elements. Prayers of praise at the beginning are paralleled by the concluding Blessing and Doxology; Intercessions for the Church, the Pope, the Bishops and for the living in the early lines of the Canon find an echo in the Intercessions for the deceased and for those present found toward the end of the Prayer; the saints whose names are proclaimed after the first Intercessions are mirrored by the Saints named after the second intercessions. And the prayer of offering and the Consecratory Epiclesis before the Consecration, are paralleled by the second formula of offering and the Communion Epiclesis after the Consecration. The essential elements of the Eucharistic Prayer are all there, but the pattern they follow is somewhat different from that of the other Eucharistic Prayers in the Roman Missal.

The Roman Canon is unique among the Eucharistic Prayers now in use, in our Church not only because of its formal language and structure, but also because of its variety of intercessions and, through the many saints it recalls, the glimpse it offers of the Church in heaven worshipping with us as we celebrate the Eucharist.

New Translation: While the translations of all the Eucharistic Prayers have been revised to some extent, the most extensive revisions have been made in the translation of Eucharistic Prayer One. The goal of these revisions, as in all the translation revisions in the New *Roman Missa*, was to provide a more accurate and literal rendering of the Latin original text. However, in Eucharistic Prayer One an added goal was to restore the more formal, majestic tone of this ancient and venerable prayer. It might be well to take time to read this prayer slowly and to reflect on the beauty of its language, its careful presentation of central truths of our faith and its expression of our relationship to God, that of humble, penitent sinners, redeemed and standing with love and awe before the Creator who first loved them..

Flexibility and Uses of the Roman Canon: The Roman Canon is the Eucharistic Prayer which is particularly appropriate for major celebrations in the life of the Church. In addition to the fact that it may be used with all of the many Prefaces of the Roman Missal, Eucharistic Prayer One has special inserts which reflect the mysteries commemorated in the principal Solemnities of the Liturgical Year. The portion of the prayer beginning with the Latin word *Communicantes*, translated as *In Communion with* has a variety of settings, as does the section beginning *Hanc igitur (Father, accept this offering)*. Thus use of this Eucharistic prayer provides an opportunity to highlight and reinforce the mystery being celebrated by the Church at a given Eucharist. It is also appropriate to use the Prayer on Sundays and the celebrations of Apostles and Saints who are mentioned in the Prayer itself.