

## Intercessory Prayers

We could look at our Sunday ritual of celebrating the Mass as a series of prayers and actions that either *remember* or *intercede*. Sometimes, simultaneously.

We remember the stories of our ancestors in faith when we proclaim again the Scriptures; we remember the actions of Jesus at the Last Supper and the prayers he prayed over the bread and the cup; and we remember those who have died, at two particular points of every Eucharistic liturgy.



The first comes during the General Intercessions, or “Prayers of the Faithful”, which contain a prayer for those who have died, and those who mourn their passing. The second comes during the Eucharistic Prayer, when we include another set of intercession prayers. In this second instance, the prayer for the dead also asks that we the living may one day join them in communion with all the saints. Often, names of saints are invoked, specifically Mary, and in the case of the first Eucharistic Prayer (the Roman Canon), a litany of saints is proclaimed, not once but twice!

The General Instruction of the Roman Missal tells us that through these intercessions, *“the Eucharist is celebrated with the entire Church, of heaven as well as of earth, and that the offering is made for her and for all her members, living and dead, who have been called to participate in the redemption and the salvation purchased by Christ’s Body and Blood.”* (GIRM 79g)

Since the Eucharistic Prayer is based on the Jewish blessing prayer, it is quite natural that it contain elements of petition. The early Christians thought of themselves as joined to Christ who “forever lives to make intercession.” (Heb 7: 25)

These intercessory prayers were added after the main structure of our Eucharistic Prayer was in place. They appeared at different times in the prayer, depending on the local community. For example, at Alexandria, they appeared before the institution narrative (“consecration”). The prayers composed following Vatican II retain the form followed at Antioch, where the intercessions came toward the end of the prayer.

They all include prayers for our church leaders, including the Pope and our Bishop. We pray for ourselves too, that our lives be joined to the offering on the altar, sanctified for what Lawrence Johnson calls “the pledge of future glory” promised by the Eucharist itself. (“The Mystery of Faith”, published by the FDLC, 1994)

*Steve Raml*  
*Director of Liturgy & Music*