

## **Prayers for Eucharist: Eucharistic Prayer for Masses With Children**

**When the eucharistic prayers for masses with children debuted in English in the mid-1970s, they accented the liturgical renewal's larger outreach to the young. The Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults had adaptations for children. So did the Rite of Penance. Prayers for children appeared in the Rite of Pastoral Care and Anointing of the Sick, as well as in the Order of Christian Funerals. Even the Rite of Baptism for Children finally had the priest or deacon address his remarks to parents and godparents, not to the infant.**

**For the eucharist, the Congregation for Divine Worship issued a directory for masses with children. A children's lectionary was developed. Into this mix came three eucharistic prayers with a simplified vocabulary, additional acclamations, and an acknowledgment of the circumstances that children face: families, friends, fears and devotions.**

**The three eucharistic prayers for masses with children were originally crafted for incremental age groups. That is probably why the first recalls that Jesus took children in his arms, the second includes a more robust set of acclamations, and the third opens with a reference to friends who share joys and sorrows. The first two were composed in French; the third in German. When they appeared in 1974, conferences of bishops were invited to select one of the three for local usage. But by 1983, all of the prayers were published in Latin, and the conferences received permission to use all three of them. When the second edition of the Sacramentary in English was printed, these prayers appeared in an appendix. No distinction among age groups is made in the final publication, though all these prayers are intended for those who have not yet begun preadolescence when they represent the majority of the congregation. However, the local bishop may permit a broader usage.**

**The Congregation for Divine Worship gave translators the freedom to let the text "correspondingly to the requirements and idiom of the respective language." The English translations included**

an epiclesis in all three of the prayers. Surprisingly, the original versions had none. The prayers were developed so early in the history of the Vatican II missal that the significance of the epiclesis had not yet been fully appreciated.

In the year 2002, the Vatican published the third edition of the post-Vatican II *Missale Romanum*. It located the three eucharistic prayers for masses with children in one of the appendices in the back of the book. The Order of Mass still embraced the four main eucharistic prayers, and an appendix to the Order of Mass – located immediately following those pages in the middle of the book – contained the eucharistic prayers for reconciliation and for masses for various needs and occasions. But the children's prayers were tucked into the appendices of the *entire* book.

This looked odd from the start. The eucharistic prayers, which all carry equal weight in terms of their function at the mass, were located in three different places in the missal. However, the first four have more distinction because they were the first fruits of the postconciliar work. That relegated the other prayers to an appendix to the Order of Mass – except the ones for children. These were removed from the heart of the book for a very practical reason. They were in Latin. There would never be an occasion when you would lead a Latin language eucharistic prayer for children – it would defeat the entire purpose.

Consequently, the prayers appeared in the appendix of the 2002 missal with a new introduction saying that they are never to be used in Latin. These are the only prayers in the entire corpus of texts for the Roman Rite that carry this restriction. The same introduction discourages concelebration at masses when these prayers are used because of the psyche of the children. But then it explains how concelebration should be carried out – if it is done.

In 2008, the Congregation for Divine Worship and the Discipline of the Sacraments reissued the third edition of the *Missale Romanum*. This time they removed the children's prayers entirely from the book. They no longer appear even in an appendix. The reason is logical: The *Missale Romanum* is the book people use when they celebrate the post-Vatican II mass in Latin. The Latin children's prayers exist only for purposes of research and translation.

**Because the Vatican wants the vernacular books to resemble the Latin originals as much as possible, the children's eucharistic prayers will not appear in the new English translation of the Roman Missal. Work on the revised translation of the children's prayers had begun with the rest of the 2002 missal, but it was put on hold after the emended missal was published in 2008. Once the revised missal comes out, those wishing to use the eucharistic prayers for masses with children will have to resort to the Sacramentary. That is the translation that will still be in force.**

**As an example of how these prayers look, here is a view of the first of them. It opens with an extended preface. (In all three of these prayers, the preface may not be replaced with others from the missal.) The assembly may interpose two acclamations during this preface. The first is the first half of the Sanctus, through the first "Hosanna in the highest." The second is the second half of the Sanctus. Then, at the conclusion of the preface, the entire Sanctus is sung – whether or not these optional acclamations were used. This lets the children sing more without having to learn new music.**

**In Latin, these two preface acclamations were not optional as they are in English. In the 2002 revision of these prayers, the Sanctus is sung once, but divided into *three* parts. The first two parts are sung where the two halves of the Sanctus appear in today's translation, and the final part replaces the complete Sanctus at the end of the preface.**

**After this comes the epiclesis, which now also appears in Latin, and leads predictably to the institution narrative. However, the memorial acclamation does not follow immediately. Instead, the prayers of memorial and offering – which usually follow the memorial acclamation – come next, and *then* the priest introduces the memorial acclamation. In the present translation, he says, "Let us proclaim our faith," probably because children would have a difficult time understanding "the mystery of faith." In Latin there is no introduction at all; somehow the assembly is supposed to start singing the acclamation at the appropriate time.**

**All the other eucharistic prayers contain three alternative memorial acclamations in Latin, but the ones for children all have four. Ironically, the additional acclamation is a dynamic equivalent**

**Latin translation of the English acclamation, "Christ has died" – the one memorial acclamation that does not have a direct equivalent among the others in Latin.**

**The prayer moves swiftly to its conclusion – through the secondary epiclesis and the intercessions for the living and the dead, to the final doxology.**

**The eucharistic prayers for masses with children may not be broadly used, but many have been charmed by their ability to invite children into a deeper participation in the mass.**

**"Formation for Eucharist: Eucharistic Prayer for Masses with Children."  
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