**Liturgy Matters Lesson #21**

**Dialogue to the Preface to the Eucharistic Prayer**

**By Bishop Chad Zielinski**

I am Bishop Chad Zielinski serving the Diocese of New Ulm. Thank you for joining me and asking the Holy Spirit to guide us as we continue our lessons on "What Happens at Mass."

There are a number of different parts to the Eucharistic prayer, so in our journey through it, we will be able to follow closely the ritual shape so that we can understand better all that is happening. We will go through the parts one by one and see how an enormous momentum builds throughout, climaxing in the whole creation joined to the whole of heaven in a perfect act of praise directed to God the Father, through Jesus Christ, in the Holy Spirit.

The Eucharistic prayer begins with the preface dialogue where the priest says, “The Lord be with you,” then “Lift up your hearts,” then “Let us give thanks…,” and then extends through to the great Amen. These three ritual verses are very ancient. We have evidence for their being used at this point in the Eucharistic liturgy in texts as old as the late second century. The first exchange, “The Lord be with you,” is a repetition of an exchange from the very beginning of the celebration. The greeting is repeated precisely because we are going to start praying now with much greater intensity and will need divine help. The priest wishes the people this divine assistance, and his greeting is a blessing in which he reminds the people that together with him, they are about to offer the Church's greatest prayer. We also become aware that by our response, “And with your spirit,” divine help will be needed even more for the priest who will play a central and unique role in this prayer. Even greater intensity of attention is required of him as he performs gestures, handles the gifts, and pronounces words, the power of which is impossible entirely to grasp. As we say, "And with your spirit,” the people are addressing the deepest part of his being where he has been ordained precisely to lead the people in this sacred action. The people are saying, in effect, “Be the priest for us now,” aware that there is only one priest, Christ himself.

The priest’s leading role throughout the entire Eucharistic prayer is meant to render concrete for the assembly a fundamental reality of all prayers but especially of this the most intense of prayers. That reality is that the Church addresses itself to the Father only through Christ its head. The priest is a sacrament of Christ, signifying this reality. The whole structure of the prayer, with the priest speaking and acting and the people following and saying their Amen at the end, is a concrete something, a mystery, in which we experience Christ as head of the body leading his whole body before the Father. Hence, in these first exchanges, the priest and the people have acknowledged and lovingly awakened each other to the roles they must play in what follows.

Thank you for joining me today in this lesson on the Dialogue of the Preface to the Eucharistic Prayer. I look forward to sharing Lesson #22 with you next week as we continue our lessons on the Liturgy of the Eucharist. Let us keep one another in prayer. May God bless you and your families.