

St. Paul warns us that the day of the Lord is coming. What matters isn't the time or the season, but what the Lord finds us doing with the new life and the graces He has given to us.

This is at the heart of Jesus' parable in today's Gospel.

Like the Worthy Wife in the First Reading and the faithful man in the Psalm, we should be found walking in the proper "fear of the Lord" - in reverence, awe, and thanksgiving for His marvelous gifts.

This is not the "fear" of the useless servant in today's parable. His is the fear of a slave cowering before a cruel master, the fear of one who refuses the love relationship that God calls us to.

Though the two good servants in today's parable were given different numbers of talents or responsibilities, each "doubled" what he was given. And each earned a generous reward for their faithfulness .... and a share of the Master's joy.

There are many, many things in this life that can bring us joy.

But our Earthly joys will not be our Heavenly joys..... accept for one.

The one joy where we get a true taste of heaven, a true taste of the divine, is right here.

We have been discussing the changes that are upcoming in the way we worship and participate in the Mass.

Last week, Father spoke of our proclaiming, publicly, what each of us believes when we stand for the Creed.

We are rapidly coming to the remembrance of the Father's Joy.

The Joy of God the Father is the redemptive Sacrifice of the Son on Calvary and the Resurrection of that same Son from the dead three days later.

Why?

Because that sacrifice, death and resurrection made it possible for ALL of His children to be with Him for all eternity.

The experience of the Mass is the Joy that will certainly follow us to Heaven precisely because it is the Joy of the Master.

Perhaps you have heard the Mass referred to the “Holy Sacrifice of the Mass”.

It is because that what happens on this altar in a few moments is a sacrifice. It does not represent the passion, death and resurrection of the Son, but rather it re-presents the once-for-all Sacrifice of Jesus made to the Father on our behalf, in our place. Both Calvary and the Empty Tomb become real and present here in this place in a very special way in the Eucharistic Prayer.

However, we must walk a three-part bridge between the Liturgy of the Word and the Liturgy of the Eucharist. The Profession of our Faith is the first part of this bridge.

The second part of the bridge is the Prayer of the Faithful and the Offertory.

The Preface is the final, joyful end of the bridge opening into the Eucharistic Prayer.

The Prayers of the Faithful are sometimes referred to as the “Petitions” or the “Intercessions”

If the Mass is the most powerful, life-giving prayer of the Church. Isn't it fitting, that we make our needs known to one another and to our God during the Mass?

The presiding priest invites us to pray.

And then we are called to service.

In order to serve well, one must know what is going on in our community.

When the deacon reads the petitions, it is meant to be a reminder, perhaps first to himself, and then to the community of his servant ministry and theirs.

After each petition, we offer together our prayer in the form of “Lord Hear our Prayer”.

After the final petition, the priest prays that God may grant them.

This is immediately followed by the offertory.

In the beginning of the bible, in Genesis, we read of Cain and Abel, the sons of Adam and Eve offering sacrifices to God. God is pleased with the Gift of Abel, and not the gift of Cain.

In terms of earthly value, Cains sacrifice was probably greater, but his attitude about the giving was all messed up. Abel approached God in humility and purity of heart and so his gift was acceptable to God.

When we give of our resources at the offertory, it is more than money that we put into the basket. It is meant to be a piece of ourselves. We offer from our resources, our money, yes, but we also should be offering our joys and sufferings of our week, our fears, our concerns, our successes in the moment should be going into the basket as well. It is not just bread and wine brought to the altar, it is ourselves. It is we who, in the giving, are asking to become the body and blood of Christ, so that we might be his hands and feet and breath in this life. That is why the gifts are always brought forward by people from the community.

The sacred vessels have brought to the altar and prepared for the gifts.

The gifts of ourselves have been placed on the altar, a drop of water is placed into the wine. A symbol of our humanity mingled with the richness of divinity.

**Father** offers the bread and the wine by raising them slightly and praying

prayers that have deep Jewish roots.

*Priest:* Blessed are you, Lord, God of all creation. Through your goodness we have this bread to offer, which earth has given and human hands have made. It will become for us the bread of life.

**All: Blessed be God for ever.**

*Priest:* Blessed are you, Lord, God of all creation. Through your goodness we have this wine to offer, fruit of the vine and work of human hands. It will become our spiritual drink.

**All: Blessed be God for ever.**

Sometimes we hear these prayers and sometimes we do not.

If there is music still playing they are said in a low tone at the altar.

When there is no music, they are said aloud and we have a response. Notice that this response does not change in the new translation.

Father then symbolically, ritually cleanses his hands and prays for forgiveness so that he might pray with us and for us.

With the gifts prepared, we are about cross the last part of the bridge. The Preface.

This is a part of the Mass that actually happens very quickly, but it is rich in meaning and action.

Please... pick up your colored cards and look on the back side. The first box is the Apostle's Creed, which we will not be talking about.

We begin with the **invitation** to prayer.

**Pray, my brothers and sisters, that our sacrifice may be acceptable to God, the almighty Father.**

Our response to that invitation is:

**“May the Lord accept the sacrifice at your hands, for the praise and glory of His name, for our good and the good of all His HOLY Church”.**

We acknowledge with the addition of the word HOLY, that in spite of all the faults and sins of the people who make up the Church, the Church still IS, as we just proclaimed in the creed, “one, holy, catholic and apostolic”

Furthermore, this prayer states our intention in asking the priest to stand worthily in the person of Jesus and offer the sacrifice for the benefit of literally everyone and everything for the Glory of God.

Now there are many prefaces in the Missal. Sometimes, Father can choose which one to pray, and sometimes it is already decided by the occasion.

Regardless of which preface is used, the message and purpose stay the same. The root meaning of the word Eucharist is “thanksgiving” and this is the common theme of almost all of the prefaces.

Our next response in the comes at the beginning of the preface. We are standing and the priest prays “The Lord be with you” and we respond with the now familiar phrase **“And with your spirit”**. The priest asks us to **“Lift up your hearts”** and so **“We lift them up to the Lord”**

Having focused our hearts on the event about to take place, Father offers this invitation “Let us give thanks to the Lord our God” but our response will no longer be “It is right to give Him thanks and praise”.

It changes to “It is right and just”. The phrase is short and simple and to the point. It is also true to the original text.

Father, with hands open, continues to pray the Preface. It is a relatively short prayer.

The preface ends with the song of Heaven.

St. Gregory of Nyssa said of this moment “Heaven may now be walked

upon by man. And the creation that was once in conflict with itself - the world below against the world above - is now knit together in friendship; and we, men and women, are made to join in the angels' song, offering the worship of their praise to God”

Isn't that amazing? We await Heaven, and at every Mass.... Heaven comes to us. This is meant to be a “wow moment”. Ideally, we should be singing this song with all we have.

What is that song?

“Sanctus, Sanctus, Sanctus”!

“Holy, Holy, Holy Lord God of **HOSTS**, Heaven and Earth are full of your glory”.

The new translation adds the word “hosts”. We are not speaking of the form of bread which is on the altar, but of the heavenly hosts, the angels that now surround the altar.

And to this song we add the shouts of the crowds on Palm Sunday.

“Hosanna in the highest. Blessed is He who comes in the name of the Lord. Hosanna in the highest”.

Heaven and Earth have joined. Jesus will soon be on the altar. And we kneel, awaiting Him and adoring Him in the proper “fear of the Lord” - in reverence, awe, and thanksgiving for His marvelous gifts.

The Eucharistic Prayer now begins.

And this is where Father will pick up next week.

I challenge us to pray these parts of the Mass that I spoke of with both zeal and humility. And listen closely to the Eucharistic Prayer today, so that when we receive Jesus in Holy Communion we might “Share in the

Master's Joy".