

Today I am coming out swinging—no preliminaries, no dancing around—we are going straight into the Roman Canon, the First Eucharistic Prayer. If you want to read it, the part I will be referring to is on page 196 of the small missalettes.

The consecration begins with these words. The priest, addressing God the Father and speaking of Jesus, says: “On the day before he was to suffer, he took bread in his holy and venerable hands, and with eyes raised to heaven, to you, O God, his almighty Father, giving you thanks, he said the blessing, broke the bread and gave it to his disciples...”

For what was Jesus giving thanks? Bread and then later wine, right? Let’s think about that for a minute. Who is Jesus? We say in the Creed that Jesus is “the Only Begotten Son of God, born of the Father before all ages. God from God, Light from Light, true God from true God; through him all things were made.” In his divine nature, Jesus helped to create the bread and wine that he is giving thanks for. In his human nature, Jesus allowed himself to be dependent upon the creatures he helped create. That tells us something about the humility of Jesus. It should also say something to us about our own arrogance, ingratitude, and attitudes of entitlement. Jesus, although God, allowed himself to receive help from the creatures he helped to create. He was grateful for the things he received, even though he helped to create them. All of the good things we have—including our lives—come from God. He created us so that he could share his love with us, but he didn’t have to do that.

When we say “grace” before meals we are imitating Jesus’ actions at the Last Supper and numerous other times in his life. However, we aren’t just saying thank you for the food in front of us, we are also giving thanks that we are about to eat it. The same thing happened at the Last Supper but what is the future action for which Jesus is giving thanks? Jesus gave thanks, blessed the bread (and later the wine in the chalice) and gave them to his disciples saying: “Take this, all of you, and eat of it, for this is my Body, which will be given up for you... Take this, all of you, and drink from it, for this is the chalice of my Blood, the Blood of the new and eternal covenant, which will be poured out for you and for many for the forgiveness of sins.”

Jesus wasn’t giving thanks for the meal he was about to eat, he was giving thanks for the meal that his disciples were about to eat—**his own flesh and blood**. The Last Supper would not be complete, though, until Jesus drank from the chalice of wine/vinegar at the crucifixion before he died. In other words, Jesus was giving thanks for his own suffering and death. This was not enjoyable for him. We are told that he would sweat blood in the Garden of Gethsemane in

dreaded anticipation of what was about to happen to him. Jesus gave thanks to his Father on the day before he was to suffer and die such a horrible death because he knew it was through that death that we would be redeemed. Do we deserve that type of love? Whether we do or not, Jesus showed us that love by laying down his life for ours.

Every Mass is a mysterious participation in that one eternal sacrifice which began at the Last Supper and ended on Calvary. When we receive Communion, we are receiving that same body and blood that was sacrificed for us on the cross. The next time you want to complain about a minor thing that annoys you during Mass, try to remember the bigger picture of what it is we are doing here. The Sunday celebration of the Eucharist is the highest form of praise, worship, honor, and gratitude we can give to God. Jesus was grateful for the opportunity to die for us. What do our words, actions, and behaviors say about our gratitude to Jesus for our salvation?