



My Dear Brothers and Sisters,

We've finally made our way through the Creed, and are now ready to speak about the last part of the Liturgy of the Word: The Universal Prayer (aka the Prayers of the Faithful). We have listened to the Word of God in the Scriptures, and professed our faith in God. Now we turn to the God, in whom we believe, trusting He loves us so much, that He *wants* to be part of our lives.

Most of the rest of the world for most of history either believed in a pantheon of gods (like the Romans, Greeks, Egyptians, and Assyrians) or in a deistic god (for instance Aristotle). With the pantheon gods you went to them to get something and you had to give them something they wanted (transactional). The deistic god was one who created everything and let the universe run on its own, not caring about it. The revelation of God to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, then later to Moses, with the culmination in the person of Jesus, shows us a very different God. Our God is the One God, and He cares intimately about each person He created. Prayer is about relationship, not transaction. When we go to Him in prayer, we call on our Father – not someone trying to “get something” from us.

The very act of the “Prayers of the Faithful” – calling out to God with faith that He will answer... *because He loves us* – this is an act of faith that would have been foreign to the world surrounding the Jewish community in which Jesus lived, and the pagan world where the Church “grew up” (in the first few centuries). I say all of this to help us realize how *incredible* it is that we can call out to our God and trust He will answer.

The typical form of the Prayers of the Faithful is that the reader (or deacon) speaks a petition to the congregation, and then invites the congregation to pray (“let us pray to the Lord). The actual *prayer* in the Prayers of the Faithful is when we respond, “Lord, hear our prayer.” It is important to remember this – that it is not just a “response,” but is when we’re supposed to be praying: talking to Almighty God.

The intentions of the prayers are also important. The format is:

- 1) for the needs of the universal church;
- 2) for the public authorities and the salvation of the world;
- 3) for those burdened by any kind of difficulty;
- 4) for the local community.

Usually we also add a petition for the dead, and then for the prayers in our hearts. This reminds us to offer up our intentions to the Lord. We have several opportunities for this in the Mass, as already mentioned: as we prepare for Mass, before the Collect (the Opening Prayer), here in the Prayers of the Faithful, as the gifts are offered on the Altar, and as we receive Communion. These are opportunities to bring the whole world, and the specific needs of our lives, to the God who loves us.

We've finished looking at the Liturgy of the Word. Next week, we'll begin looking at the Liturgy of the Eucharist. If you remember back to September, I wrote about the Eucharist as Presence, Sacrifice and Communion. The first several articles were about the Eucharist as Presence. As we move into the Liturgy of the Eucharist, we will see more clearly the Eucharist as Sacrifice, culminating with Eucharist as Communion. Let us pray to have our eyes opened a little to the mystery of God's gift of the Mass and the Eucharist.