

**Homily for August 14, 2005  
20th Week in the  
Year of the Eucharist**

**By Father Charles Bowes**

**Isaiah 22:19-23  
Romans 11:33-36  
Matthew 16:13-20**

## *Prayer changes others and us.*

In this Year devoted to a heightened awareness of the Eucharist requested by the Pope, we continue our reflections...this week focusing on the Prayer of the Faithful or General Intercessions.

The deacon or the lector says, "For our Holy Father and all the leaders of the church, we pray to the Lord." And all of us immediately know how to respond: "Lord, hear our prayer." This form of prayer was new to Catholics after the Second Vatican Council, but by now the response is almost automatic. The danger with automatic responses, of course, is that we tend to forget the deeper meaning of what we do and say.

The petitions that follow the Profession of Faith are called the Prayer of the Faithful or the General Intercessions. Each name tells us something important about this prayer. It is called the Prayer of the Faithful because only those who are baptized, those who belong to the Order of the Faithful, say this prayer. Remember that the catechumens, who are not yet baptized, are dismissed before this prayer begins. This is a time when we who are baptized carry out one of the responsibilities that flows from our baptism: to pray for the needs of the world. By baptism, we share in the

priesthood of Christ. As Christ prayed for and gave his life for the good of all people, so we are called to offer prayers and intercessions for the needs of all people today. It is our long-held belief that prayer changes others and us, and so we pray...we pray that God will act in the history of those needs and events and people we name.

The General Instruction of the Roman Missal says that this prayer generally includes four main categories of intentions: "for the needs of the Church, for public authorities and the salvation of the whole world, for those burdened by any kind of difficulty, and for the local community" (#70). There may be more than one petition in any of these categories, but these general areas remind us that the prayer is to be universal in scope. It seeks to address the needs of all people, near and far. Thus the prayer is also called the General Intercessions.

At the same time, while they are to be broad in scope, the petitions are also to be current and local. They address the needs of our world in our own time, and they reflect local needs as well as global ones. This is really the reason that these petitions were restored to the Mass after the Second Vatican Council. The rest of the prayers at Mass are prescribed in the official books. Though we can choose from a number of

options in the liturgy, we are not free to rewrite them or create our own. In the Prayer of the Faithful, by contrast, we are expected to write our own. Though published examples can give us ideas of how to compose them, the petitions are intended to be written each week in the local community. Otherwise they cannot reflect what is happening at this particular time and in this particular place.

This weekend, at all the Masses, we are introducing a Book of the Prayer of the Faithful in which folks are welcome to write their needs. This book will be available on a table in the center aisle in the rear of church from now on. This way, we can consult the book each week as we craft our prayer to be used at the Masses that weekend. The crafted prayer of that week can be inserted in the back of the book, and of course will change from week to week. The last petition each week will read this way: "For the needs mentioned in our Book of the Prayer of the Faithful, and for needs unspoken but within our hearts, we pray in silence...for these too we pray to the Lord."

This use of a book in which to write names or needs has a history in our parish and is actually drawn from the practice of the Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults. You may recall that we use our "Book of the Dead" during the month of November to write the names of our deceased loved ones, and during the War in Afghanistan we made use of a book to enshrine the names of our loved ones in military service. These practices, as this one of the Prayers of the Faithful, stem from the use of the Book of the Elect. You may recall that on the first Sunday of Lent, those elected or chosen for the Sacraments of Easter inscribe their names in a book - this Book of the Elect. Then the book is shown to us all as we sing an acclamation. As

we unpack this ritual, reflect on it after the fact, a number of folks make the connection with their own baptism - that somewhere there is a book, the baptismal register of the church in which they were baptized, in which their name is inscribed. Salvation, following the Lord Jesus, is as real as ink on a page. From that use of this book it was not a far step for parishes to begin using a Book of the Dead and now, a Book of the Prayer of the Faithful.

During the recitation of the Creed, a lector will bring this book to the ambo, proclaim the prayer, and afterwards return it to its table and open it for all to use. Do feel free to use it and exercise your right and responsibility as one baptized to pray for the needs of the world, for any need you see fit.

**Prayer changes others and us.**