

DOL 239. CONSILIUM, *The Universal Prayer or Prayer of the Faithful*, 17 April 1966: Vatican Polyglot Press, 1966.

Documents on the Liturgy 1963–1975: Conciliar, Papal, and Curial Texts (Collegeville, MN: The Liturgical Press, 1982), edited and translated by Thomas C. O'Brien of the International Commission on English in the Liturgy, hereafter abbreviated "DOL."

INTRODUCTION

The Constitution on the Liturgy has taught and decreed (art. 53) the following on the universal prayer or prayer of the faithful: "Especially on Sundays and holydays of obligation there is to be restored, after the gospel and the homily, 'the universal prayer' or 'the prayer of the faithful.' By this prayer, in which the people are to take part, intercession will be made for holy Church, for the civil authorities, for those oppressed by various needs, for all people, and for the salvation of the entire world."¹

On the same point the Congregation of Rites' instruction on the orderly carrying out of the Constitution on the Liturgy, 26 September 1964, has this to say (no. 56): "In places where the universal prayer or prayer of the faithful is already the custom, it shall take place before the offertory, after the *Oremus*, and, for the time being, with formularies in use in individual regions. The celebrant is to lead the prayer at either his chair, the altar, the lectern, or the edge of the sanctuary. A deacon, cantor, or other suitable minister may sing the intentions or intercessions. The celebrant takes the introduction and concluding prayer, this being ordinarily the *Deus refugium nostrum et virtus* (Missale Romanum, Orationes diversae no. 20) or another prayer more suited to particular needs. In places where the universal prayer or prayer of the faithful is not the custom, the competent territorial authority may decree its use in the manner already indicated and with formularies approved provisionally by that authority."²

This present booklet, composed under the care and effort of the Consilium, has as its purpose to give illustrative samples of such texts in order to provide the competent ecclesiastical authority with models for the correct preparation, in its own region, of formularies or with criteria for its approval of such formularies. The series of texts presented here are therefore not to be taken as obligatory.

A French translation is printed alongside the Latin text in order to facilitate the work of the territorial authority in the preparation of vernacular texts. This arrangement shows to what extent intelligent adaptations may be made in keeping with the idiom and rules of each language.

The samples of sets of intentions provided here generally correspond to the sets of chants for Mass in the *Graduale simplex* (Vatican Polyglot Press, Vatican City, 17 April 1966).

CHAPTER I PRACTICAL DIRECTORY

§ 1 NATURE AND PASTORAL VALUE OF THE PRAYER OF THE FAITHFUL

¹ DOL 1 no 53.

² DOL 23 no. 348.

1. “Universal prayer” is a term for a prayer or intercession directed to God, made at the invitation of the proper minister and by the faithful as a group. This prayer makes intercession for the various needs of the Church, especially the universal Church, and of the whole world.

2. Thus this prayer has three noteworthy characteristics:

a. *It is a petition addressed to God.* Therefore it is not the expression of adoration or thanksgiving alone; nor is it in praise of some saint or a summary to give instruction on truths about religious obligations or the nature of the Mass.

b. *It is a petition to God chiefly for blessings of a universal kind:* on behalf of the whole Church, the world, all those “beset by various needs”; nevertheless it is proper also to pray for the faithful actually making up the assembly.

c. *It belongs to the whole congregation* (“with the people taking part”), because the assembly responds to the minister’s invitations and does not through a single *Amen* simply conclude petitions made by the minister alone .

3. There is a place for this prayer not simply during Mass, but also in popular devotions and in the other rites of the liturgy, in keeping with what the Constitution on the Liturgy has described. Firm in its faith in the communion of saints and in its own all-embracing vocation, the gathered Church in offering this prayer stands as the great entreater and advocate appointed for all humanity. The holy people of God exercise their royal priesthood to the fullest above all by sharing in the sacraments, but also by joining in this prayer. Of its nature this supplication still belongs only to the faithful, not to catechumens.

4. The place proper to the prayer of the faithful is at the end of every celebration of the word of God; as a rule it takes place even if the eucharistic sacrifice is not to follow (see the instruction of 26 September 1964, nos. 37 and 73 C).³

The reason is that this prayer is the fruit, as it were, of the working of the word of God in the hearts of the faithful: instructed, stirred and renewed by the word, all stand together to offer prayer for the needs of the whole Church and the whole world. Thus there is an analogy: sacramental communion is the conclusion and, in regard to the people’s participation, the climax of the liturgy of the eucharist; the prayer of the faithful, according to the witness of antiquity, appears as the conclusion and, in regard to the people’s participation, the climax of the entire liturgy of the word. This is why the Constitution (art. 54)⁴ and the Instruction cited (no. 57),⁵ when dealing with use of the vernacular in the liturgy, both first of all make mention of the readings and of this prayer.

But the prayer can also be seen in another way as a hinge between the two parts of the Mass: it terminates the liturgy of the word in which God’s wonderful works and the Christian calling are brought to mind; it ushers in the liturgy of the eucharist by stating some of those general and particular intentions for which the sacrifice is to be offered.

5. The prayer of the faithful is to be put into use as often as possible, so that it may “be restored especially on Sundays and holydays of obligation” (SC art. 53)⁶ and also on weekdays at all Masses celebrated with a large number of people present.

³ See DOL 23 nos 329 and 365.

⁴ See DOL 1 no. 54 [The Vatican text reverses the SC and InterOec references].

⁵ See DOL 23 no 349.

⁶ See DOL 1 no. 53.

§ II. PARTS AND MINISTERS

6. The prayer of the faithful consists of several parts: the announcement or statement of the intentions; the responses of the assembly; the concluding formularies. Another part that may be included is an introductory commentary.

7. It is the celebrant's responsibility to motivate the people in regard to this prayer by introductory comments on its liturgical and pastoral significance. Such an introduction, normally brief and addressed not to God but to the people, may touch on the liturgical season or on the theme of the feast or of the saint being celebrated, and it should connect these with the ensuing prayer. But an introduction may be omitted for a good reason, especially when the prayer of the faithful immediately follows the homily.

8. In the style of the ancient Roman usage, the priest himself may propose the intentions to the people. But, in accord with *Inter Oecumenici* (no. 56),⁷ this function usually belongs to the deacon.

In Masses with no deacon present the function should be assigned to some other suitable person assisting (e.g., a commentator) or to the celebrant or one of the concelebrants.

If the intentions are set to music, which is desirable, the minister or the person assisting must be able to sing properly.

When the celebrant himself does not announce the intentions, he responds along with the congregation and does not continue Mass until the universal prayer is over, thus following the rule given by *Inter Oecumenici* in the case of confirmation or marriage celebrated within Mass (nos. 66 and 72).⁸

9. After the priest's introductory comments (designated in the formulas of this booklet as "Section A"), there are usually four sets of intentions in any prayer of the faithful (excepting the cases in no. 10), namely, for:

B. the needs of the Church universal, e.g., for the pope, the bishops and pastors of the Church, missions, Christian unity, vocations to the priesthood and religious life (Section B);

C. national or world affairs, e.g., peace, leaders of government, good weather, the safety of crops, elections, economic crises, etc. (Section C);

D. those beset by poverty or tribulation, e.g., for those absent, the persecuted, the unemployed, the sick and infirm, the dying, prisoners, exiles, etc. (Section D);

E. the congregation and members of the local community, e.g., those in the parish preparing for baptism, confirmation, orders, marriage, for pastors, for a coming parish mission, for first communicants, etc. (Section E).

At least one intention from each set is to be announced.

10. In such votive celebrations as weddings or funerals more scope is allowed for the appropriate votive intention, but never by completely omitting the general intentions.

11. *As to structure*, the intentions *usually are expressed in one of three forms* (as is indicated

⁷ See DOL 23 no. 348.

⁸ See DOL 23 nos. 358 and 364.

in the historical summary in this booklet):

- a. the full form (“Let us *pray for . . . that*”), which states those to be prayed for and what is to be prayed for. An example is the invitations to prayer or first part of each of the solemn prayers on Good Friday;
- b. a first partial form (“Let us pray *that . . .*”), which immediately mentions the favor to be requested, referring in only one word to the persons prayed for. An example is the petitions of the final section of the Litany of the Saints;
- c. a second partial form (“Let us pray for . . .”), which states only those being prayed for. Examples are some of the litanic “deprecations” in both the East and the West.

12. Of utmost importance is the part of the prayer of the faithful involving the congregation’s participation. For this to be real and active it is better that it be repeated with each invitation to pray. There are four ways of doing so:

- a. a short acclamation, always the same in the same celebration; this is the easiest form of participation and established by the long usage known by the name “litany”;
- b. participation through silent prayer during a suitable pause; though seemingly passive this silent participation, tested by its Roman usage in the solemn prayers, can contribute a great deal to prayer;
- c. the communal recitation of a rather long intercessory formulary; to avoid boredom, however, it is necessary that there be variety in the texts and that the faithful have written copies of them;
- d. finally, a combination of the first and second: after a brief silence, the deacon in a second, very short invitation calls for the congregation’s acclamation. This way can be used on certain more solemn occasions.

Without doubt the first way has the most to recommend it, even though it is right that there be complete freedom to use any of the others.

13. Because the Constitution on the Liturgy calls for participation by the people and this is really the principal element in the prayer of the faithful, it is completely out of place in Masses with a congregation for only the choir or ministers to respond to the one announcing the intentions.

14. The conclusion of the prayer belongs to the one presiding (see *Inter Oecumenici* no 56).⁹ As a rule, the conclusion takes place only once at the end of the whole prayer and usually in the form of a concluding prayer, limited to asking God to hear the petitions poured forth. This concluding prayer should in no way be a repetition of the opening prayer of the day. But in votive celebrations, where most of the petitions relate to the votive intention (see no. 10), the priest’s concluding prayer may also express this special intention.

§ III. RESPECTING FREEDOM IN THE USE OF THE PRAYER OF THE FAITHFUL

15. In order that the prayer of the faithful may be an expression of the authentic prayer of the Church as universal yet at home in every place and period, there must be a strong preference for the freedom to vary formularies and match them to the character of regions or peoples.

⁹ See DOL. 23 no. 348.

16. Greater conformity can be required for the concluding part and a degree of uniformity in the people's responses for individual nations or neighboring regions sharing the same language. More freedom is left in regard to the choice of petitions and the ways of participation. But such freedom must respect the essential properties of the prayer of the faithful already stated.

17. For the Roman Rite as a whole, the Consilium sets out the *principles* and *rules* governing the right arrangement of the prayer of the faithful.

18. But it is for the territorial bodies of bishops and, where applicable, for local Ordinaries to approve formularies (see *Inter Oecumenici* no. 56)¹⁰ and to provide pastors with an ample collection of intentions to choose from.

19. It is proper to leave it to the pastor of a church:
a. to choose from among the many approved formularies for intentions those to be announced for each set;
b. to add a few other intentions of his own composition, provided he respects the rule on keeping the four classes of intention indicated in no. 9 and writes out the text ahead of time.

20. To ensure that the prayer of the faithful will not become an aggravation to the people because of its length, the competent authority may stipulate the maximum number of intentions for any Mass, if this seems warranted. But it will be permissible to exceed this number on a given occasion, e.g., at a celebration of the word, at a pilgrimage, or at some extraordinary gathering.

CHAPTER II

SAMPLES FOR COMPOSING A PLAN FOR THE UNIVERSAL PRAYER

There is no need to translate the samples given into the various languages. It is better that the texts be made to suit the character or language of each people.

The term *oratio communis* or *oratio fidelium* itself can be quite readily expressed by synonyms, for example, *prex* or *deprecatio universalis*. The expressions *oratio communis* or *oratio fidelium* are retained in documents because they are the accepted terms in antiquity and because of their *technical* meaning. Even so, a literal translation of them does not seem to be the best translation: the whole Mass is a universal prayer of participation and the Lord's Prayer is distinctively the prayer of the faithful.

These various samples do not rule out other styles of composing the prayer of the faithful, especially in regions where this prayer is already the practice. The formularies assigned for the various seasons or feasts are offered merely as examples and others may be substituted at the discretion of the conferences of bishops. In individual formularies the sequence of intentions (B, C, D, E), although generally preferable, is not entirely obligatory (see formulary 52 for weddings): e.g., in votive celebrations it will sometimes be better to begin the prayer of the faithful with the votive intentions, which are more on the minds of the congregation, so as to go from these particular intentions to the more general. [. . .]

¹⁰ See DOL 28 no. 348.

Form II¹¹

In the course of the silence after each bidding, the People offer their own prayers, either silently or aloud.

I ask your prayers for God's people throughout the world; for our Bishop(s) _____; for this gathering; and for all ministers and people.
Pray for the Church.

Silence

I ask your prayers for peace; for goodwill among nations; and for the well-being of all people.
Pray for justice and peace.

Silence

I ask your prayers for the poor, the sick, the hungry, the oppressed, and those in prison.
Pray for those in any need or trouble.

Silence

I ask your prayers for all who seek God, or a deeper knowledge of him,
Pray that they may find and be found by him.

Silence

I ask your prayers for the departed [especially _____]
Pray for those who have died.

Silence

Members of the congregation may ask the prayers or the thanksgivings of those present

I ask your prayers for _____

I ask your thanksgiving for _____

Praise God for those in every generation in whom Christ been honored [especially _____ whom we remember today].

Pray that we may have grace to glorify Christ in our own day.

Silence

¹¹ From "the Prayers of the People," The 1977 Book of Common Prayer (New York: Seabury), 385–386.