

Roman Missal, 3rd Edition

Looking at the text 5

The Lord be with you.
And with your spirit.

Lift up your hearts.
We lift them up to the Lord.

Let us give thanks to the Lord our God.
It is right and just.

seem threatening – that he will judge us and therefore he may condemn us. This should not be underestimated for we must recognise the call to do what is right. But the Bible also portrays God as a Judge in a richer way. We are told he is the Judge who defends the widow and the orphan, who rescues the downtrodden and the oppressed.

A modern vision of judge tends to focus on one who weighs evidence and then makes a decision.

The biblical understanding adds to this. The judge not only makes an assessment, he helps, he provides a solution. When I look to Jesus to come as the Judge of the living and the dead I should see him as my rescuer, my Saviour.

The priest makes this clear as he continues with the Preface. He says 'It is truly right and just, our duty and salvation, always and everywhere to give you thanks'. In Mass the work of our salvation is being accomplished in each of us. As we give thanks we are being drawn into God's saving work. It is not only our duty but it is also the way in which God, our Judge, comes to our rescue. It is truly right and just.

Q *Think about with others what we think about the idea of God as our Judge.
Do we thank God often enough?
Do we connect our thanks with Mass?*

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Lift up your hearts

The priest invites us to lift up our hearts as he begins the Eucharistic Prayer to draw us more deeply into the Mass in which Jesus saves us by his death and resurrection.

When we talk about our heart we mean those things which we feel most strongly and so to lift our heart means to raise our deepest hopes and longings to God. In our celebration of the Mass we bring before the Lord in prayer all the people whom we love, the experiences that give quality to our lives and the situations we worry about. We lift them up to God, bringing everything that is in our hearts to him.

In ancient times the heart didn't just mean our emotions but also our thoughts and understanding. To lift our hearts means to raise our minds. Paul tells us to 'set your minds on things that are above, not on things that are on earth' (Colossians, Chapter 3 verse 2). This is to give us a sense of direction in life. It is not about ignoring this world but to see what is really important and where we are going. It is like going for a walk in the country. Often we have to scan the horizon and note landmarks we are making for rather than just have our eyes upon the ground.

When the prayers of the Mass were being looked at after the Second Vatican Council those with responsibility for editing the Missal made a small but important change to the Prayer after Communion for the Second Sunday in Advent. Up until then it seemed to say 'teach us to despise the things of earth'. It is a very ancient prayer and it was recognized that many might misunderstand the word 'despise'. In our day it means to treat with contempt even hatred. Originally it didn't mean that. It was about weighing things wisely, looking at things with care. For this reason they changed the words to draw out the idea behind it more clearly. Now it says, 'teach us to judge wisely the things of earth and hold firm to the things of heaven'. This is at the centre of what it is to lift up our hearts.

Q *Think about whether we get too caught up with the things of this world. What lifts up our hearts?*

Perhaps you might pray this special Prayer after Communion.

R *eplenished with the food of spiritual nourishment,
we humbly beseech you, O Lord,
that, through our partaking in this mystery,
you will teach us to judge wisely the things of earth
and hold firm to the things of heaven.
Through Christ our Lord.*

Let us give thanks — It is right and just

In the dialogue between priest and people at the start of the Eucharistic Prayer there are some important things going on. The priest says, 'Let us give thanks to the Lord our God', inviting us to give thanks and to draw us deeper into the Eucharist which, as we know, means 'thanksgiving'. He asks us to join him in Christ's sacrifice of thanksgiving which is the Mass.

Giving thanks is at the heart of our faith. We are thankful for the many good things God has done for us; the wonder of creation, the joy of life itself, the comfort of family and friends. As Christians we see something deeper in the struggles of life and hardships that we endure. It is not easy, but we can learn and grow and become more fully human from both the joys and sorrows of life. All this should be part of our thanksgiving every day. It is perfectly expressed in the Mass; Christ's act of thanksgiving.

Our reply to the priest's invitation to give thanks helps us to recognise that this is something we are all called to do. We say, 'It is right and just.'

Notice we add to the idea that it is 'right' to give thanks another one that it is 'just'. Words like 'just', 'justice' and 'judge' recall our duty to do the right thing but these words have a meaning in the Bible that helps us understand the Mass more deeply.

The Old Testament picture of God as Judge can

