

On the Revised Translation of the Mass  
Bulletin Insert 15  
“The Universal Prayers”

After the Creed of the Mass, various petitions are offered to God. Saint Justin Martyr attests to this custom in 155 A.D. He writes in defense of what Christians do in their worship and explains, “on the day we call the day of the sun [Sunday], the memoirs of the Apostles or the writings of the Prophets are read; then the president verbally instructs, and exhorts to the imitation of these good things. Then we all rise together and pray.”

This is what we still do today when we respond to the prayers offered by replying, “Lord, hear our prayer.” The content of these prayers comes from the encouragement of Saint Paul in 1 Timothy 2:1-2, which says, “I ask that supplications, prayers, petitions, and thanksgivings be offered for everyone, for kings and for all in authority.”

Since the prescribed prayers consider needs beyond those held by any one particular individual or community, Saint Justin referred to them as “the Universal Prayers.” This is why the General Instruction of the Roman Missal says that the series of Universal Prayers is to be ordered first for the Church, then for public authorities or the world’s salvation, then for those burdened by any kind of difficulty, and finally for the local community.

The Universal prayers should not be called out by individuals in the congregation since they are to reflect the universal needs of the whole world. This is why they are properly called the Universal Prayers instead of the prayers of the faithful. We recall the personal intentions of our hearts during the offertory, which is why “lift up your hearts” is said.

The power of the Universal Prayers to intercede for the Church and the whole world is palpable. Catholics all over the world rise and say in different languages, “Lord, hear our prayer!” The Universal Prayers are a continuation the many languages uttered when the Holy Spirit descended at Pentecost.