

The Prayer of the Faithful

Kristopher W. Seaman

We are quite familiar with signed petitions. Whether with a knock on our house door, leaving the local mall, walking through downtown, or the frequent forwarded e-mails that fill our inboxes, we are asked for our signature to show our allegiance to a particular cause. I have to admit that I always have been cautious about signing my name to anything, since signing one's name to a document is a powerful act. There is another kind of petition that I am not cautious about, and that is the petitions that are part of the Prayer of the Faithful.

The word *petition* comes from the Latin for “request.” The Prayer of the Faithful, which concludes the Liturgy of the Word at Mass, is composed of petitions. First, the priest celebrant invites us to pray. Then a deacon or reader—or cantor, if sung—proclaims each intercession, or petition. These petitions ask, or request, something to happen. These petitions call us to God's future, to God's hopes for us in the present. There is a future vision of what should be, that we pray will become present in the contemporary. For instance, if a country or region has recently been struck by a natural disaster, we should include a petition that prays for God's love and care of those human persons afflicted. Or, we pray for those sick who seek God's healing presence. Though these petitions or intercessions are not addressed directly to God, we know that we have to be gifted by God's Spirit and so pray, “Lord, hear our prayer.”

To each intercession, the liturgical assembly replies typically with “Lord, hear our prayer.” We are told in our official liturgical documents that in liturgies not involving special occasions, such as funerals or marriages, the Prayer of the Faithful should include an intercession in four categories. These categories are for the Church, political authorities and the world, the oppressed or those suffering difficulties, and for the local community (see *General Instruction of the Roman Missal*, 70). Each category involves all of us in different ways. Moreover, they are also the communities in which we find ourselves: Church, world, nation, local assembly, neighborhood and those in all of our communities who are in particu-



lar need. We are members of the Church; we are political persons who are stewards for the earth in which we live; we and others have special concerns that arise due to natural disasters, political unrest, genocide, wars, and so forth; and finally, we are members in this local community. These are the faithful's prayers for four communities.

We pray for various communities because we were baptized as priests, prophets, and kings. Part of what it means to be baptized is to pray to the high priest, Jesus Christ on behalf of the world. The Church community prays on behalf of the whole world, for all in need. This is the definition of intercession: We pray on behalf of one another and in the case of the Church community it is the world and all who are in need. This is prayer centered on others. This is why petitions are “general” and not particular. Here is an example: For all who are struggling with the challenges of illness, especially Jane, Roger, Margaret, Gene, and Andrew: May God's healing presence be felt in their lives. The prayer is general because it prays for all people struggling with illness, but then includes particular names rather than only including particular names. While the community is concerned about one person, the community's role is to pray for all and on behalf of all. Intercessory prayer extends to all peoples.

You will not notice any changes to the Prayer of the Faithful when the third edition of *The Roman Missal* is implemented (except for the titles which include Bidding Prayer and Universal Prayer). Parishes will continue to compose their own prayers, or use those written and published by the various Catholic publishers, or use the revised texts that are included in the appendix to the Missal.

The Prayer of the Faithful should be something to which we are not cautious about signing our name when we acclaim, “Lord, hear our prayer.” It is a powerful act of the Church community praying on behalf of those in need throughout the world. This prayer is asking for God to become tangible, to become present in the contemporary for the entire world. Our prayer is for the Church throughout the world, for governments and nations, for people in need and for our local communities.