

On Liturgy and Theology  
in the  
Book of Common Prayer

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The Great Thanksgiving

When the gifts have been brought forth and the altar table has been set by the deacon, the presider (priest or bishop) begins The Great Thanksgiving, or Eucharistic Prayer. This begins with a dialogue about presence, about lifting up the heart, about giving thanks:

*Celebrant* The Lord be with you.

*People* And also with you.

*Celebrant* Lift up your hearts.

*People* We lift them to the Lord.

*Celebrant* Let us give thanks to the Lord our God.

*People* It is right to give God thanks and praise.

Cyril of Jerusalem, 4th century theologian and Bishop of Jerusalem, said this of the Great Thanksgiving:

For at that most awesome moment we must indeed raise our hearts high to God, and not keep them intent only on the earth and earthly matters. So, the priest is virtually commanding you all at that moment to lay aside the cares of this life, your domestic worries, and to keep your heart in heaven on God who loves you.

The proclamation of the prayer of the Great Thanksgiving is “the ministry of the presider, but it is also the action of the entire assembly, who respond to the invitation by giving their assent.”<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Mitchell, 169.