

On Liturgy and Theology
in the
Book of Common Prayer

13

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.”¹

¹ Mitchell, 169.