



An Instructed Eucharist, Part II
Church of the Holy Communion, Memphis Tennessee
November 15, 2009

ANNOUNCEMENTS

Today's Instructed Eucharist is an opportunity to enhance our understanding of liturgy and make our worship even more meaningful. A brief reminder--- that although the flow of our service will be supplemented by several notes of instruction, please remember that all we do is worship as we respond to the good news of Jesus Christ in heart and mind.

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Having looked at the Liturgy of the Word last Sunday, today we learn about the second part, the **Liturgy of the Table**. Any questions that come to mind during today's Instructed Eucharist can be addressed at the forum today which will be about our liturgical practices.

In many parishes, announcements typically follow the passing of the peace, after which the priest says an offertory sentence from scripture that invites and encourages us to give of ourselves to God. The ushers come forward with offering plates to collect our monetary offering (or **alms**) and bring forward the bread and wine (called, the **oblations**) for God's table to be set for Communion. Both actions are avenues through which we return to God that which God has given us. Our alms, or money, represent the fruit of our labor...how we spend our time and use our talent in life. The bread and wine are changed through human labor from what God has provided. The grain has been cultivated, harvested, milled and baked into the bread we offer. The grapes were picked, pressed, and fermented to make the wine. This moment of the liturgy symbolically enacts the truth that "all that we have and all that we are" belong to God. The liturgical principle involved is that "the part stands for the whole." And so the offertory signifies the offering of our whole selves—body and soul, heart and mind to God so that we too may be transformed by God's grace into the Body of Christ to serve the world.

The choir now makes their own musical offering through an anthem as the ushers collect the alms and the altar is set by the deacon for our Communion meal. At other times, the congregation is invited to sing a hymn which is a more direct offering of praise or hear instrumental music offered by one or more musicians – all as offerings to God.

OFFERTORY ANTHEM

The focus of the liturgical action (*our work in worship*) has shifted from the lectern and pulpit to the altar (or table). The altar has two different roots for its origin. The first was the altar in the Jerusalem Temple.

Only the High Priest of the Temple could approach the altar. It was on this altar in Jerusalem that animal sacrifices were offered for the sins of the people. The second root for the altar is the dinner table, like the one around which Jesus and his disciples shared the Passover meal. However, the table Jesus shared with his disciples was much lower, for it was customary at that time for the people to recline on the floor, resting on one arm, as they shared a meal. It was in Jesus' last Passover meal with his disciples that the animal sacrifices of the Temple were replaced by Jesus' offering of his body and blood in the bread and wine. Jesus offering of himself makes the altar now very accessible to us all.

On the altar are several special items. The candles have their origin in the simple need for light, so that one could see the table. They now symbolize the illumination in our world caused by the presence of God. The two Eucharistic candles on the altar have also been identified by tradition as being emblematic of Christ's humanity and divinity.

Until our focus is on the altar, a **veil** has covered the holy vessels placed on it. The color of the veil matches the color of the other hangings (lectern, pulpit) based on the designated season of the church year calendar. (Currently we are in the season of Pentecost when the color is green.) A stiff, linen, pocket-like appointment called a **burse** (sounds like "purse") sits on top of the veil and contains linens and cloths used in serving communion. Extending the length across the table from one end to the other is a long, white tablecloth called the **fair linen**. Placed on top of the fair linen is a small, white cloth called a **corporal** (named for the Latin word for body). This serves as a kind of place mat to protect the fair linen and on which all of the sacred vessels and the communion elements are placed. The plate used for the bread is called a **paten**. In this parish, we also use a silver bowl to contain the bread wafers which are then placed on the patens and **bread boxes** for distribution. The cup for the wine is called a **chalice**. From the earliest times, the Christian community melted down their precious metals and jewelry so it could be fashioned into a silver chalice as a reminder that this is where their true common treasure is to be found. A single chalice on the altar is a symbol of our unity in Christ. The container storing the bread is called a **ciborium** (the term coming from the Latin word for food). The **flagon** is a large silver pitcher from which the wine is poured into chalices. The cloth used to wipe the chalice during communion is called a **purificator**. A large print Altar Book called the **missal** is placed on the altar in a stand for the celebrant to lead the Eucharistic prayer; all other aspects of the liturgy based on The Book of Common prayer and more are found in this (altar) book.

The altar is prepared or set as a table set for our community banquet. Our banquet is called the **Eucharist** based on the Greek word for "thanksgiving". Acolytes (literally coming from the Latin word that means "one who stands by another,") assist as the table is set with the holy vessels for our Communion meal. The bread has been placed on the paten and the wine poured into the chalice. A bit of water is mixed with the wine following an ancient Jewish household custom. It also reminds us of the blood and water that poured down Jesus' side on the cross.

After the table is set and offertory music has ended, a Presentation Hymn follows and the ushers come forth with more gifts. All stand to sing (typically one stanza of a the hymn) to more fully identify with our offerings that are being presented. Again, our gifts of money in the offering plates, bread and wine on the table, and others gifts (such as perishable food items) are elevated as a symbol of presenting ourselves to the Lord, being lifted into God's presence through our praises.

PRESENTATION HYMN

The eucharistic prayer or Great Thanksgiving recalls God's saving actions throughout history. It resembles an ancient Jewish prayer said at a fellowship meal which begins with the same dialogue, inviting participants to bless God. The Book of Common Prayer offers four different versions of the Great Thanksgiving in Rite II. Today we are using Eucharistic Prayer A. Although the wording of each is different, they share common elements that together constitute the consecration of the Eucharist: giving thanks for our holy history, the narrative about the institution of the Last Supper, the offering of our lives, the invocation of the Holy Spirit and the concluding doxology.

The technical names of these parts of the Eucharistic liturgy come from Latin words used in the Mass of the Roman Catholic service for centuries. The Great Thanksgiving begins with the *Sursum Corda*, which is Latin for "lift up your hearts." We begin our response to God's saving acts by lifting our hearts in praise to God. Often the priest will lift his or her arms as a way of encouraging the congregation's participation in this movement. The celebrant then invites us to join in thanksgiving to God, to which the congregation responds by acknowledging that it is a right, good, and joyful thing to give God thanks and praise.

The Eucharistic prayer begins with a brief description of why it is particularly "a right, good and joyful thing" to give God thanks and praise in words "proper" to the day or season of the year. These **Proper Prefaces** for all of the seasons and holy days for the church year can be found on page 377 of the Prayer Book.

We then sing an ancient majestic hymn called the *Sanctus*, based on Isaiah 6:3 and Revelation 4:8. The Latin word "*sanctus*" means "holy." Both of these scripture passages depict angels constantly singing this song of praise to God. After the *sanctus* comes the *Benedictus* or *Benedictus qui venit* which means, "blessed is the one who comes." These words expectantly point to Jesus' triumphal entry into Jerusalem on Palm Sunday.

SURSUM CORDA
PREFACE/PROPER PREFACE
SANCTUS
BENEDICTUS

The italicized directions in the prayer book – called **rubrics** – then tell us at this point to either stand or kneel. Both are acceptable postures of a heart turned toward God. In the early church, people stood as the posture for giving thanks and celebration. It is the posture of the risen life in Christ. This is one of the reasons why one of our eucharistic prayers says that in Christ God has “made us worthy to stand before” Him (BCP, p. 368). It is only more recently that kneeling has become a common posture for prayer, following a later, more penitential practice. . Lay Eucharistic Ministers, subdeacon, and acolytes join the clergy standing around the altar to symbolize that it is that whole community that celebrates the Eucharist together (...remember the part stands for the whole). The celebrant begins the prayer with uplifted arms in a most ancient Jewish posture of prayer.

At the heart of the Eucharistic prayer is *anamnesis*. This Greek word literally means “to remember.” It is the opposite of amnesia, to forget. When we have amnesia, we forget who we are and where we come from. With *anamnesis*, we remember in such a way as to bring Christ’s death and resurrection alive again in vivid, spiritual ways—ways that make the saving power of events 2,000 years ago present and active. *Anamnesis* takes place in the eucharistic prayer as we remember the story of salvation history—how God created us in love, how we fell into sin and separation from God, and how God sent Jesus Christ to redeem us through his death on the cross.

EUCCHARISTIC PRAYER, PART I

Holy and Gracious Father....through.....a perfect sacrifice for the whole world.

Part of the sacred memory of salvation history is the **institution narrative**, found in the gospel accounts and I Corinthians. These are the words Jesus used in the first communion service with his disciples the night before his crucifixion. In this service, Jesus gave bread and wine to his disciples, telling them that it was his body and blood given for them. Jesus instituted the communion service with this command: “Do this for remembrance of me.” Literally this phrase would say: Do this for the anamnesis of me. The institution narrative tells us of Jesus’ four-fold action: *taking, blessing, breaking, and giving*.

During these words, the priest enacts what Jesus did— taking the container of bread in his or her hands and, at the reference to the cup—holding the chalice for all to see and touching the flagon filled with wine. The priest may also offer an act of devotion after each, either pausing, bowing or genuflecting. A sanctus bell is rung after each reference to Jesus’ words at the Last Supper.

The sanctus bell was used in earlier times in churches, before there were pews, when worshipers wandered about the church in order to alert them to pay attention as a sacred moment was taking place. As the bell was rung from the church tower, it also signaled to those in the community not in attendance that the Mass was being offered for them.

Our remembering the past is blended with our anticipation of our future hope in the words of the **memorial acclamation** that summarizes the mystery of our faith: “Christ has died, Christ is risen, Christ will come again.” It is said by all as a affirmation of our faith in what God has done and will bring to culmination in God’s time.

EUCCHARISTIC PRAYER, PART II

On the night he was handed over.....through.....Christ will come again.

The prayer continues with what is called the oblation (or offering) as the gifts of bread and wine are offered as a symbol for our lives so that God may transform both through his Spirit.

The priest then asks God to sanctify both the elements of bread and wine and ourselves so that both may serve God’s purposes. This is called the **epiclesis** which means “calling down upon.” During this part of the prayer, the celebrant prays for the Holy Spirit to come down upon the gifts of bread and wine to set them apart as the body and blood of Christ and to come down on us so that we may faithfully receive and be transformed by God’s presence. The celebrant employs a manual action at this point, either touching the bread and the chalice or making the sign of the cross over them, or both to focus our attention on God’s action. In response, worshipers may make the sign of the cross on themselves to signify their own reception of God’s Spirit so that they may be dedicated to God’s purposes in the world. We do not presume to know the details of how God transforms the elements into the consecrated Sacrament. We claim God’s promise that God will be present with God’s people at this meal, through the mystery of God’s grace.

The prayer then concludes with a word of praise called the **doxology** (coming from the Greek word for honor or glory, “doxa”) . This trinitarian ascription culminates the prayer of consecration. The priest elevates the consecrated elements beckoning the congregation’s assent to this common Prayer.

The people then join with the celebrant in saying the **Great Amen**. The word “amen” means “so be it.” It indicates our participation and affirmation of all that has been prayed. You’ll notice that in the Prayer Book this AMEN is capitalized (...one of the few places it is in all caps), indicating that the congregation should say it loudly and with great emphasis. The Eucharistic Prayer is incomplete without the crucial assent of the people as this is our work.

That fits with an Anglican understanding of when the consecration of the bread and wine actually occurs. In contrast, the Roman Catholic tradition gravitates toward the consecration taking place during the Institution Narrative, whereas in the Orthodox tradition the moment of consecration focuses on the invocation of the Spirit. Rather than isolating any one part of the eucharistic prayer , Anglican tradition generally holds that the entire prayer as prayed by the gathered assembly with the celebrating priest is that which consecrates the bread and wine. By the time we say the Great Amen, we no longer have just ordinary bread and wine, but the **Real Presence** of Christ – the Body and Blood of Christ – in the consecrated elements.

EUCCHARISTIC PRAYER, PART III

We celebrate the memorial.....through.....AMEN.

The **Lord's Prayer** concludes our corporate prayer. It is known as the universal prayer of Christendom and is included in every service of the Episcopal Church. It would be better called the Disciples' Prayer as Jesus taught it for us to use in our devotions.

The **Fraction** or the Breaking of the bread follows. In this dramatic action, the celebrant breaks the bread to symbolize the breaking of Jesus' body by death on the cross. We briefly pause in silence to ponder this great sacrifice and God's love for us. The fraction words ("*Christ our Passover is sacrificed for us*") are taken from I Corinthians 5:7, and the celebrant can say them, chant them, or a cantor or choir can sing a Fraction Anthem— as is our custom. The congregational response whether said or not is: "Therefore let us keep the feast."

The celebrant then invites the congregation to come forward and receive Communion. The elements are lifted and extended as we are invited to partake of this banquet. The rubrics for this **Invitation** (page 338 or 364-365) allow for one or both parts to be said by the celebrating priest. The first part ("The Gifts of God for the People of God") expresses an objective view of the Real Presence of Christ in the Eucharist. "Objective" means that God's grace becomes available and is received independent of the faith-state of the communicant. The second part ("Take them in remembrance that Christ died for you, and feed on him in you hearts by faith, with thanksgiving.") expresses a more subjective understanding of the Eucharist. "Subjective" means that one's faith-state plays a role in proper reception of the bread and wine. The tension of holding both the objective and subjective views together has been part of the Anglican experience since the 16th Century and expresses a comprehensive, catholic and reformed understanding of the Real Presence in the Episcopal Church. .

LORD'S PRAYER

FRACTION

INVITATION

As the celebrant serves communion to the ministers of the Eucharist, the choir sings an anthem and the ushers move into place to direct the congregation to receive Communion.

All baptized persons are invited to receive Holy Communion in the Episcopal Church. Communion is served with the words reminding us of this holy food for God's holy people. Communion is served at the altar rail or at two standing stations at the front of the church. The bread is received in worshipers open hands (your right hand placed over the left in the pattern of the cross). You may then either eat the bread at once and then partake a sip of wine from the

chalice, helping to guide it to your lips by grasping its base— or you may hold the bread in your fingers and dip it (not your fingers) in the wine, called intinction. Reception of either element is considered making a full communion. The Prayer Book directs that a proper response to receiving Communion is, like that following a prayer, to say “Amen” after receiving the Sacrament. Many people cross themselves before and after receiving communion as a symbol of incorporating the grace of God into their hearts and lives. This is a sign of reverence for the holy food and drink which we receive. It’s also a sign of self-dedication—a committing of self anew to the service of God and neighbor.

COMMUNION

In this church, we follow an ancient practice of taking part of our Sacrament to those who could not be present with us, especially the home bound or those who are ill or in assisted care facilities. We commend these Eucharistic Visitors as they do carry for us the bread of life and the cup of salvation to those who are also part of the Body of Christ. As they carry the sacrament, they also carry not only our prayers but a part of us with them as well.

A **post-communion prayer** follows the communion. In this prayer, we thank God for feeding us in communion and pray for grace to go into the world in God’s service. The grace we receive in communion is not given just to make us feel better. It’s also given to empower us for God’s service in our daily lives. Episcopal priest, Barbara Brown Taylor, has put it this way: “This holy meal is not Eggs Benedict and champagne cocktails for heaven’s executives; it is a stack of buckwheat pancakes...for [God’s] day laborers, giving us the calories we need to do the work God has given us to do.”

Next comes **the blessing**. The celebrating priest stands before the congregation and, making the sign of the cross over them, blesses the people in the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. This action is making explicit what is implicit in our worship—we have been blessed to be in God’s presence. Many persons mirror the priest’s action by crossing themselves. This is one way to make the priest’s action our own by participating in the blessing bestowed upon us.

During the concluding procession, the ministers of our liturgy exit their places at the front of the church accompanied by a hymn. Again, this movement is not just functional, following a cross down the aisle with the Gospel Book held high in procession symbolizes that our worship calls us to leave this sacred place and go into the world in which we are called to take the good news and the grace we have received here.

The service concludes with words of **dismissal**. While there are several options for the dismissal, they all speak of going forth or going in peace. These are the final words we hear and they reinforce the teaching that the sacrament is meant to empower us to go forth and serve the world in Jesus' name. As icons of servant ministry, deacons (when present) say the dismissal and the people respond in thanksgiving at being called to mission with their lives. Some have called the dismissal the most weighty moment in our liturgy as it is a call to action to take what we have received here and share it with others. Our worship has concluded, now our service begins.

SENDING FORTH OF EUCHARISTIC VISITORS

POSTCOMMUNION PRAYER

BLESSING

PROCESSIONAL HYMN

DISMISSAL