

## Instructed Eucharist

---

*Written by Dr. Jacqueline Soltys and Fr. Robert Travis*

*Delivered at the 10:30 AM Eucharist, on December 14th, 2008*

*Deacon Brett begins here, from the lectern.*

I. Instruction: after the opening sentences, before the collect for purity.

Today, in place of a sermon, we will hold an Instructed Eucharist. An Instructed Eucharist is a series of teaching comments and explanations about the service. The notes are brief and are designed to explain some of the words and actions we repeat each Sunday. An Instructed Eucharist focuses our attention on what we do and say every week during worship and offers us the chance to deepen our understanding of our prayer and purpose.

The texts and patterns for our service are found in The Book of Common Prayer. The structure and prayers of our service are derived from the earliest surviving texts of Christian worship. The Book of Common Prayer not only unites us with fellow Episcopalians and Anglicans across the modern world, but joins us across time with all Christians through its ancient prayers and patterns.

The Service of Holy Eucharist is made up of two parts: the Liturgy of the Word and the Liturgy of the Table. The word “liturgy” means “work of the people.”<sup>i</sup> When we sit in the pews we are not spectators, but participants and co-creators in God’s holy work.

II. Instruction: after the collect of for purity and before the collect of the day.

We begin the first part of the service, the Liturgy of the Word, by focusing our thoughts and minds on God through the Collect for Purity. For centuries this collect was said silently by the priest. In 1552 the Prayer Book made this prayer a public one, spoken aloud by the priest with all the people.<sup>ii</sup> We then pray the scriptural theme in the Collect of the Day. The word collect simply means a collection of prayers. Following the Collect of the Day we listen to God’s word.

At Ascension, as throughout the Anglican Church worldwide, we follow a fixed pattern of scripture reading which is called the lectionary. The lectionary ensures that we will hear most of the Bible read aloud within a three-year cycle. The lectionary we are now following in the Episcopal church is called the Revised Common Lectionary, or RCL. The benefit of this lectionary is really all about Christian unity.

Because we use the RCL, we know that we are hearing the same scripture readings in church each Sunday as those heard by friends who are Methodist, Lutheran, Presbyterian and some other denominations.

Since we worship with our bodies, as well as with our minds and hearts, we sit and stand and kneel at different points during the service. Although these postures are optional, we typically follow the biblical Jewish and Christian practice of standing to praise God and to pray. We sit to listen; we kneel to show penitence or devotion.

The Liturgy of the Word is based on ancient forms of synagogue worship, handed down to us from the time of Jesus. We begin with a reading from the Old Testament, which is traditionally read by laypeople. All join together in reciting from the ancient hymnal of the Jews, the Psalms. We stand for the Gospel reading to show the special importance of Jesus' words and actions; in the Anglican tradition, the Gospel is always read by a deacon or a priest if a deacon is not present.

### III. Instruction: after the scripture readings, but before the Nicene Creed

We respond to God's word by proclaiming our belief through prayer. We declare our most fundamental beliefs in the Nicene Creed. This is one of the oldest texts of Christian worship and was adopted as the core of shared beliefs by the undivided church in the 4th century. After declaring our faith, we pray for ourselves and for others. Together we confess our sins before God and, through the priest's absolution, are assured of God's forgiveness.

In the early centuries of the Christian Church, the unbaptized would be asked to leave the service at this point.<sup>iii</sup> Only baptized persons were permitted to see the Eucharist. After visitors left, Christians would greet one another with "the kiss of peace," signifying their unity in Christ and their readiness to receive communion. The peace has also come to signify the sharing of the peace that we have just received from God as our sins have been forgiven.

### IV. Instruction, after the Peace, but before the Offertory

The Peace marks the end of the Liturgy of the Word and the beginning of the Liturgy of the Table. The Liturgy of the Table is based on Jewish fellowship meals, particularly Passover.<sup>iv</sup> In it we repeat the words and actions of Jesus, as He commanded us to do. Using the words Jesus gave us, we tell the story of His death and resurrection, as Christians have done for 2,000 years. As we repeat Jesus' words, as we reenact the blessing and the breaking of the bread, we declare the core of our faith and join with all Christians who have come before us and all Christians who are yet to be.

In our tradition, the table is prepared by the deacon, who places the bread, wine, paten and chalice upon the altar. As the priest prepares the bread and wine, he or

she follows the four-fold pattern Jesus used to feed the crowds and His own disciples at the Last Supper: taking the bread, blessing it, breaking it, and giving it to the people.v

Christ's presence in the bread and wine unites us with God and with one another, making us one body in Christ. This is why the Eucharist is sometimes called "communion." The word Eucharist means Thanksgiving in Greek, which is why this portion of the liturgy is called The Great Thanksgiving.

*Deacon Amy Begins here, from the Altar.*

- V. Instruction: During the Eucharistic Prayer (The Deacon at the altar will say each instruction following the quotations from the prayer.)

"doxology"

What follows is the beginning of the prayer of consecration. The celebrant tells the narrative of Jesus' saving work on the cross and His last meal with his disciples.

We begin the prayer by giving permission for what is about to be accomplished in our presence. (*these sentences are called the sursum corda*)

The priest will then say what is called a "Proper Preface." This is used in the Western Christian Church to emphasize the seasons of the Church Year or a particular occasion without changing the Eucharistic prayer.vi Today our Proper Preface is focused on Advent.

- VI. Instruction: following "rejoice to behold his appearing."

In the praise of God the congregation shares the song of the angels and the whole company of heaven. The Sanctus, "Holy, holy, holy," is the song of the seraphim in Isaiah's account of his vision of the Lord.vii We sing or say this together, and the clergy at the altar customarily bow to show reverence to God as the angels do in Heaven, for they veil their faces before God. Then the congregation will stand or kneel for the remainder of the prayer. It was the custom in the early Church and remains so in the Eastern Church to stand during the Eucharistic prayer.viii The 1979 Book of Common Prayer gives us the option of standing or kneeling. Standing symbolizes standing with the risen Lord. Kneeling symbolizes reverence to the present Lord, as servants of our King.

- VII. Instruction: following "Hosanna in the highest."

Here in prayer the celebrant gives thanks to God for the major acts of goodness and love that God has shown us in history.

- VIII. Instruction: following "out of death into life."

Now we recall the story of the first Holy Communion, when in the night before He died for us Jesus took bread and wine, blessed them, and shared them with his companions. The substance of the sacrament of Holy Communion consists of bread and wine. Bread is basic to life and symbolizes the fruit of the earth, as well as our labor in growing and harvesting it. Bread is a symbol of fellowship; the word “companion” means one with whom you share bread. Bread is essential to human life; in Hebrew, the word for “bread” and “life” sound almost identical.<sup>ix</sup> In addition to similar fruit of the earth symbolism, wine is also associated with joy and fellowship. In blessing the bread and wine, Jesus used the blessing prayer in common use in the Jewish community, but He added the words “this is my body,” and “this is my blood.” As He commanded his disciples, Jesus commands us as well: “Do this in remembrance of me.

IX. Instruction: following “do this for the remembrance of me.” before “Therefore,…”

We are about to say the memorial acclamation. It is a literal translation of the Eastern Orthodox memorial acclamation<sup>x</sup>, and is a place in which the congregation affirms its remembrance of what has happened, and its belief in what is to come. The oblation, or offering, which follows is a recognition by the celebrant that we are offering this sacrifice of our thanksgiving to God.

X. Instruction: following “this bread and this wine.”

Here the celebrant calls upon the Holy Spirit to make the bread and wine sacred, that they may become the body and blood of Jesus Christ, the basis of our covenant relationship with God. There have been many debates over the centuries about the sacramental nature of the consecration of bread and wine. While some argue that the transformation of normal bread and wine into the body and blood of Christ happens at the words “this is my body,” and “this is my blood,” others argue that it happens when we pray that the Holy Spirit will sanctify the bread and wine. The Anglican Church, in trying to bring these viewpoints together, believes that the entire Eucharistic prayer is effective in this transformation. Through repeating the words and actions of Jesus' last meal with his disciples, we ourselves join the story and make it our own. We don't just watch the drama or listen to it unfold, but we enter into the story as we too take the bread and wine and eat and drink. The bread and wine of this sacrament are outward signs of an inward and spiritual grace. The grace is that Jesus Christ is truly present in the bread and wine. We call this doctrine the Real Presence of Christ. We are not trying to define how Jesus is present in the bread and wine; we are just saying that we know Jesus is really present in the consecrated bread and wine. We are content to let the question of how remain a mystery. This Real Presence is not the result of a magical incantation on the part of the priest. Jesus becomes present to us in the bread and wine by the power of the Holy Spirit.

XI. Instruction: following “and his Blood of the new Covenant”

This is a supplication which requests the blessing of the Holy Spirit on us through our partaking in this sacrament. Many make the sign of the cross here to recognize this blessing. We pray to be united to Christ in his sacrifice.<sup>xi</sup>

XII. Instruction: following “being sanctified by the Holy Spirit.”

The ending of the prayer is eschatological.<sup>xii</sup> That means it refers to the end of time, when God will create a new Heaven and a new Earth, and all will follow Jesus.

XIII. Instruction: following “the author of our salvation.”

The end of the prayer is called a doxology. It places the whole prayer in the name of the Trinity, Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

XIV. Instruction: following “AMEN.”

The people's AMEN or the “Great AMEN” is where the people affirm and assent to the previous prayers.<sup>xiii</sup> The Lord's Prayer follows. The link between our daily bread and the spiritual food we receive in the Eucharist is an ancient connection. In the Lord's Prayer we ask for daily bread, meaning the things we need to get through each day. The Eucharistic bread feeds us God's presence, which is also essential to our daily life.

XV. Instruction: following “for ever and ever. Amen.”

The priest now breaks the bread and gives it to the congregation. These are the third and fourth of the four actions we described earlier.<sup>xiv</sup> Communion is taken by first receiving the bread by placing your right hand over your left and extending it to the priest. You may then either eat the bread at once and then partake of the wine, guiding the chalice to your lips, or you may hold the bread to dip it into the wine. Dipping the bread in the wine and consuming them together is called intinction. Anyone who has not been baptized, or who does not wish to receive communion, may either come forward for a blessing, or wait in their seat. If you do wish to come forward for a blessing, please cross your arms over your chest in an “X” to signify your intention.

Some of the communion bread and wine is set aside each week to take to the sick and shut-in. If you or someone you know would like to have communion brought to them, you can ask the priest to make arrangements.

XVI. Final Instruction: before the Post-Communion Prayer

Our final prayer, the blessing and the dismissal mark the end of the service. Our

worship has formed and fed us not just as individuals, but as a community of God's people. The end of the service reminds us that our faith may begin privately, but does not end privately. The Eucharist and the Blessing from God empower and embolden us to take God's word and healing power out of the church and into the world, to serve Christ by serving others.