

## THE INSTRUCTED HOLY EUCHARIST

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When I buy a movie to watch at home or if I rent one, one of the first things I do is turn on the commentaries. DVDs nowadays will many times offer audio commentaries from the director, producer, or the actors. While I am watching the movie, I can listen to the people that were instrumental in making the film explain why certain things were done and what was really going on with the acting, production, and the story. And after I watch the movie with the audio commentary, my experience of the film is changed forever. Now I have more insight, more knowledge, and more appreciation to what is going on.

This morning I will provide the audio commentary to today's service. The service will continue as it always does, but you will hear explanations concerning everything that goes on with the hope that you will be changed forever and that the next time you step in this church, you will have more insight, knowledge, and appreciation for what happens in this place.

This is called the Celebration of the Holy Eucharist. To put another way, it could be called the Celebration of the Sacred Thanksgiving. We know what celebration means, but we may not realize that holy means "separate" or "sacred" and that Eucharist comes from the Greek "eucharistia" meaning "thanksgiving." The Holy Eucharist does not refer just to Holy Communion, but to the entire service, because from beginning to end, we are sacredly giving thanks for God's love and our salvation. The name also implies that we are doing something, we are not just spectators, we are giving thanks and we are giving thanks for something sacred in a sacred manner.

Another name for the Holy Eucharist is "Mass." The word mass does not really mean anything special but it comes from the Latin phrase the deacon sang at the end of the service, "Ite missa est," which means, "Go, it is the dismissal." Centuries ago, when people talked of going to mass, they were going to stay for the entire service.

I am wearing funny clothes. Actually I'm not wearing funny clothes, but since these garments are no longer commonly worn, they just look strange. Underneath the robes I am wearing a collar. Like most things in the church there are two reasons for this; a practical reason and a spiritual reason that was added later. The practical reason for the collar is Roman orators would wear bands of linen to protect their throats. The spiritual reason is

tied to St Paul referring himself as a slave of Christ, and the collar represents the joyful shackles of slavery in God's service.

The white undergarment is called an alb. Alb is from the Latin meaning "white." It represents the baptismal garment. It was once traditional for everyone to wear a white garment, symbolizing the purity bestowed upon them in baptism with the washing away of original sin.

The stole represents the yoke of Christ, whose yoke is easy and his burden is light. The chasuble more than any other vestment, is a continuation of Roman secular wear that was over time, associated with the priestly ranks.

We begin the Eucharist, or the mass, with the ringing of the bell. In older liturgies, the priest would ring a bell in the sacristy right before he walked out to approach the altar. The ringing of the bell let everyone know the mass was about to begin. When we ring the bell, we are doing the same thing. It means, get ready, something is about to happen.

After we ring the bell we have the procession. The procession is not just a pretty parade with a song, but it represents the people of God coming to this place for a purpose, and that purpose is to worship. I guess we all could process in together but that might be a little chaotic. Singing, however, unites our voices as one. During the procession the cross leads the way, unless incense is used. We bow to the cross out of reverence, not unlike men taking off their hats when the pledge of allegiance is recited or when people place their hands over their hearts when the National Anthem is sung. The cross is the symbol of our salvation. Christ died for us, and his resurrection defeated the power of sin and death.

(The bell is rung and the procession begins)

The first part of the said liturgy is the Opening Acclamation, it's the first words that set the stage for our work as the people of God, which, by the way, is what liturgy means, the "work of the people."

The next prayer, the Collect for Purity, is an ancient English prayer that dates from the 11<sup>th</sup> century. It used to be a part of the private prayers said by the priest at the altar. You will notice I turn around to say these prayers. I'm not doing it because the prayers are resting on the altar, but as we pray to God, we are praying in the same direction. I am not praying to you and you are not praying to me, but we are standing as one people facing East,

or the direction of the rising sun, of light overtaking darkness, praying to our Heavenly Father.

Next is the song of praise. Typically we sing the Gloria in Excelsis except during Advent and Lent.

The priest then salutes the congregation and the people respond showing that the mass is the work of the entire assembly. Following the salutation, the priest reads the collect for the day, which is a short prayer that collects the intentions of the people in one prayer. This collect reflects the church year and many times, the themes in the readings.

### **The Opening Acclamation**

### **The Collect for Purity**

### **The Gloria**

### **The Collect of the Day**

Every Sunday in the Episcopal Church we read from 4 parts of the Bible. We read from the Old Testament twice and twice from the New Testament. We do this to have a complete picture of God and God's message to us. Reading from the whole Bible gives us context. The readings are arranged to climax with the Gospel reading, the words and actions of Jesus, the Word of God Incarnate. Because our salvation comes in the person of Jesus we treat his words and actions with great respect. That is why the Book of the Gospels has a beautiful cover and why the Book is carried with great honor. There is nothing strange about treating the book this way. Just about everyone agrees the American flag should be treated with respect and we go to great lengths to make sure the flag doesn't touch the ground or is torn and so on. Likewise we hold the words of our salvation to an even higher degree. That is why we stand up during the reading of the Gospel. It is also customary to make the sign of the cross on your forehead, lips, and heart when the Gospel is being announced. You do this when I do it. This is a manual prayer asking the words of the Gospel to be in our minds, on our lips and in our hearts. Again, this is not unlike holding your hand over your heart at the pledge of allegiance or the national anthem.

### **The Readings**

Now would be the time that I would preach the sermon. Don't worry, I won't preach today, for this commentary serves as the sermon. Sermons illuminate the readings proscribed for each day and should confirm and challenge the listener. Some sermons explain things. Some sermons are calls to action. And some sermons are proclamations. And sometimes, they do all three! Sermons are not meant to be boring. In fact, the hope is that you will participate in the sermon with your mind and heart and not just *endure* the sermon. In some churches the sermon takes up half the service or more. For us the sermon takes about 1/6 of the service. The reason is the sermon is not the end all be all. It is one part of our worship of God. We come to sing, to pray, to listen, and to celebrate Holy Communion.

After the sermon we affirm our faith. The joke among priests is we say the creed after the sermon to correct all the mistakes we make in preaching. "Despite what we said, 'We believe in one God...'" The word creed comes from the Latin "credo" which means, "I believe." We say "we believe" because our faith is not private; it's communal. Being a Christian means being a part of a larger community. We have come here as a people and together we say, "We Believe." The Nicene Creed is the combination of creeds produced from the Council of Nicea in 325 and the Council of Constantinople in 381. At the least, the words we say at this part are over 1600 years old.

## **The Creed**

The Prayers of the People say exactly what we do next, we pray. The Book of Common Prayer directs that we pray for the Universal Church, its members and its mission, the nation and all in authority, the welfare of the world, the concerns of the local community, those who suffer and those in any trouble and those who have died. If you pay attention over the weeks, you will notice that every form of the prayers include all of these petitions. The Prayer Book helps us remember that the world is larger than Waynesboro and we are called to pray for the entire world.

After the Prayers, I say a collect and we then confess our sins. There is a reason why we confess our sins here. We have come together as a people, as a church, we have heard the readings and listened to the sermon. We have been challenged and we have affirmed our

faith in God. We have prayed for the world and have been made mindful of all of those in need, including ourselves. And with all of this in mind, we reflect on our own broken state and confess to God all the things we have done and left undone. After we confess the priest gives absolution. I as your priest do not forgive your sins in the sense that you have offended me and I forgive you. Rather I absolve your sins the way a mail carrier delivers your mail. He doesn't write the letters you receive, but he delivers them. Jesus breathed the Holy Spirit on his disciples and told them that if they forgive the sins of others they are forgiven. At ordination, the bishop, the successor to the apostles, calls the Holy Spirit to make a person a priest and he is given that authority to deliver God's forgiveness.

### **The Prayers of the People**

#### **The Confession and Absolution**

In a moment we are coming to the altar to receive the greatest gift ever given, the Body and Blood of Christ. It is the ultimate in communion, in coming to a union with God. Before we do that, we need to make sure we are at peace with each other. Passing of the Peace is not fellowship time. In the old days, we would kiss each other, showing that we are reconciled to each other.

#### **The Peace**

The Offertory is when we bring our offerings to God. Most people assume this is just when we give our tithes and gifts, in other words money. We do present our financial offerings to God but if you'll notice we also bring bread and wine from the back of the church. In the past the bread and wine would have come from your fields and from your vineyards so along with the dollars and coins, we bring the things from the earth that will feed us as the Body and Blood of Christ.

#### **The Offertory**

This final part of the mass is called the Great Thanksgiving. It consists of the Sursum Corda, which is Latin for "lift up your hearts" in which we elevate our hearts to

God. There is a proper preface, which varies according to the church year, and then we sing the sanctus. Sanctus is Latin for “holy” as we sing the thrice-holy hymn, one for each person in the Trinity, the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. This is the heavenly hymn that we find in the book of Isaiah and the book of Revelation.

After the hymn we have the anamnesis. Anamnesis is the opposite of amnesia. We are remembering everything. You will hear the whole story of our salvation in Christ unfold. After that we come to the verba or words of institution, where the words of Christ are repeated saying, “This is my body” and “This is my blood.” Following the verba is the epiclesis or invocation of the Holy Spirit. We have disagreed throughout the history of the church as to when the ordinary bread and wine becomes the body and blood of Christ. Some in the west have thought it is when the priest says the words of Christ while for those in the east, the epiclesis, or calling of the Holy Spirit changes the bread and wine. For us, it is the whole action that mystically and mysteriously changes the bread and wine into the Body and Blood of Christ. We cannot explain it, nor do we really try, but we believe that when we come to the altar rail we are receiving the Body and Blood of Christ. By eating the bread and drinking the wine we are communion with God and in a very real way, God is in us and we are in God.

## **Sursum Corda**

### **Preface**

### **Sanctus**

### **Anamnesis**

### **Verba**

### **Lord’s Prayer**

Dom Gregory Dix, a great Anglican theologian described the Eucharist as four actions – taking, blessing, breaking, and giving, emulating the actions of Jesus. At the fraction I break the bread and then offer it to the assembled church. When you come to receive the bread and wine, come with confidence. Hold your hands out one over the other in a posture of reception and when the host is put in the palm of your hand, either place it in your mouth or wait for the chalice if you wish to have the host dipped in the wine. Drinking out of the same cup scares some people, but the symbolism is powerful. We are one people

partaking of the one cup. In communion we are united, not divided, and the sharing of the cup underscores that reality. Plus there are billions of Christians all over the world that drink out of the same cup every week and you never hear of epidemics of germs being spread. But you don't have drink out of the chalice, you may hold your host and the Lay Eucharistic Minister will dip the host and place it on your tongue.

Because we believe baptism incorporates us into the Body of Christ, only baptized members may receive Holy Communion, but that does not exclude others from coming to the altar to receive a blessing. To receive a blessing, cross your arms over your chest and I will give you a blessing.

### **The Fraction**

### **The Communion**

You may frequently wonder why I drink the rest of the wine. You will notice that I am very careful to collect every crumb from the hosts and put them in the chalice. Any wine that has been consecrated needs to be treated reverently. It is not reverent to pour Christ's blood down the sink so we consume it. I combine the crumbs from the hosts and the remaining consecrated wine and consume it. This action is called the ablutions, from the Latin, "to wash away."

After the post-communion prayer in which we give thanks to God for the gift of the Eucharist and ask God to strengthen us in our journey and in our ministry to the world, we have the blessing. Several times during the mass and including the blessing I make the sign of the cross and you make the sign of the cross. This is the most basic manual prayer in Christendom. Making the sign of the cross identifies us as Christians, it recalls our baptism where we were buried and raised with Christ, and it can mean many different things to us. It can be a prayer for God's protection against evil and temptation. It can be an affirmation of who we are as Christians, or it can be a sign of comfort, knowing that God is near. Boy Scouts and Girl Scouts have their salute, sports fans have their mascots and colors, and Christians have the sign of the cross.

### **Post-Communion Prayer**

### **The Blessing**

## **Processional Hymn**

Just as we have come in this place we now leave in the same manner. The people of God have come here and now the people of God, strengthened by the Holy Spirit and the Body and Blood of Christ leave as one to go into the world taking the light of Christ into the darkness.

So, let us Go forth in the name of Christ

**Thanks be to God!**