

Liturgy

The Entrance Rite

The Congregation Gathers

Prelude

On the People of God

It is important to remember that the whole congregation worships together and that includes the liturgical ministers that we have appointed to various tasks as leaders for our worship. We select them because we recognize certain skills that they possess, yet we do not separate them from us as we offer the liturgy to God. The Presider, the Deacons, the acolytes, the choir and the people in the pews all serve integrally related and equally important roles in our liturgical life together. Because the body of Christ is composed of these many members, and because each is equally important, whenever one person is missing, the dynamics of the liturgy change. This is why we make it a point to remember those present and those absent, those on earth and those in heaven. We are all people of liturgy, celebrating the people's work.

On Processions

We do a lot of processions in our liturgical life together. On a regular Sunday, we participate in: the Procession In; the Gospel Procession; the Procession of the gifts to the altar during the Offertory; the Procession of the Congregation to the Altar; and the Procession Out. Add to those standards additional layers for other services – censing the altar, the Procession during the Great Litany, the Procession of the Candidates during Baptism, the Processions of the Bride and Groom, the Procession of the Cortege at a funeral, the Triumphant Procession on Palm Sunday, the Processions of Light at Candlemas and at the Great Vigil. And then there's all the processing that happens when the Bishop visits!

Today, I want us to focus on the ones in which we will participate this morning. The Procession In is the last step in the call to prayer, as the congregation gathers. Cross and candles, choir and Gospel book, thurible and incense boat, Priests, Deacons, and acolytes all make their way down the aisle, representing the beginning of our worship together. Some sacramental theologians remind us that this procession is not made up of single elements, but represents the congregation gathered. In an attempt to demystify the holy, the cross, the light, and sometimes the Gospel Book are led through the people. The

ministers who will later be celebrating the Eucharist, healing the sick, and absolving us of our sin are approachable – among the congregation. It's almost as if you could reach out and touch them. And you can.

The procession during the Gospel is a particularly holy and powerful time when the Good News is proclaimed to God's people from their midst. It brings us back to the days of Christ, when we would have gathered in a close circle around the bearer of the Good News to hear the stories told again. While read from a book, it reminds us of the oral tradition from whence we have come. The lights are the traditional elements that accompany the Gospel procession - the obvious reference to the Light of Christ being the pertinent symbol.

The processions at the Offertory and at the Eucharist are two very important processions. They represent two moments when the People of God come forward to give and to receive their gifts. They reemphasize the fact that processions are events which involve, or attempt to involve the whole congregation. We'll speak more about the Offertory later in the service.

Finally, our last procession is the missional procession of our common life together. The same people and elements which gathered the congregation in prayer now lead the charge to go out into the world, proclaiming the good news, bearing the gifts of God, and telling our story to those we meet.

The procession of the Ministers into the church is about to begin.

The Opening Hymn

The Opening Acclamation

The Gloria

On The Collect of the Day

The Collect of the Day concludes the entrance rite, and brings us into the Liturgy of the Word. Introducing the theme of the day either in the Gospel or in the life of Christ, the collect frames the conversation we will have in our readings and our response to the readings.

Collect of the Day

The Liturgy of the Word

On the Liturgy of the Word

The Prayer Book indicates that the full title of the principal Sunday worship service is The Holy Eucharist: The Liturgy for the Proclamation of the Word of God and Celebration of the Holy Communion. For our purposes, what is important to note is that the Eucharist is comprised of two major components: in the first part, the Liturgy of the Word, the central action is the reading and exposition of Scripture. In the second part, the Holy Communion, the central action is the taking, blessing, breaking, and giving of the Sacrament of bread and wine.

Word and Sacrament together are the essential components of Christian liturgy, for we believe that Christ is present both as the Living Word of God proclaimed in the assembly and as the Bread of Life received in the Sacrament. Christ is therefore present in us who feed on the Word of God and the Holy Sacrament. When we stand for the Gospel reading and reverently surround the Gospel Book with light, incense, and music, we give tangible witness to our trust that Christ is present in the Word.

The Liturgy of the Word begins with the entrance rite as we gather and prepare to hear the Word of God proclaimed. Gathering for the public reading of Scripture is rooted in the practice of the Synagogue and was quickly adapted for use in the early Church. Of course, initially, the readings were from the Hebrew Scriptures (or Old Testament). Later, as Christian writings began to appear, these, too, were read aloud during gatherings for worship. In fact, most of what came to be included in the New Testament canon of Scripture was selected on the basis of its widespread acceptance and usefulness in worship. These writings were meant to be read in public for the Church's instruction and edification.

Although the number and choice of readings varied greatly in the early Church, over time the practice of reading one lesson from the Old Testament, a psalm, a lesson from a New Testament epistle, and a selection from one of the four Gospels became normative. Thus, the four Scripture lessons we read each Sunday (or in the case of the psalm and sometimes the Gospel, chant).

This four-fold reading is prescribed as a three-year cycle of readings called a lectionary. The lessons for Major Feasts are selected as appropriate to the occasion. In year A we read the Gospel according to Matthew; year B, the Gospel according to Mark; year C, the Gospel according to Luke; the Gospel according to John is read during Lent and Easter and on certain other occasions each year. The New Testament Epistles are read in sequence over the three-year cycle, with Old Testament lessons chosen to complement the Gospel or Epistle reading appointed for the day.

This choice of readings is important for several reasons. First, it provides exposure to almost the entire New Testament and a large part of the Old Testament over a three-year period, challenging us to understand our faith in light of the breadth of the Biblical

witness and not simply our favorite verses. Second, the lectionary requires us to read Scripture in light of Scripture, not in isolation. We have to come to grips with the diversity, indeed the contradictions, within Scripture in the process of interpreting its significance for our own time and place. Such a reading of Scripture reminds us that this diversity was constitutive of both Israel and the Church right from the very beginning – there is nothing new about that! If Scripture isn't always in agreement, then we need not worry too much if we aren't always in agreement either! Finally by including an Old Testament lesson and psalm we affirm our continuity with Judaism and insist that we can only understand Christian faith in light of Jewish faith. Christianity without Judaism is simply impossible and our incorporation of Hebrew Scripture in our worship serves to caution against any anti-Jewish or anti-Semitic readings of New Testament Scripture.

The First Reading from Scripture

On the Role of Music and the Psalm

Between the first reading from the Old Testament and the second reading from the Christian scriptures, the choir leads the congregation in singing a selection from the Psalms, which were the hymns of both the Jews and the early Christians. The primary role of the choir is to provide musical leadership for the congregation. It is a role of liturgical ministry, not musical entertainment. In addition to this primary role, the choir is also pleased to be able to sing anthems, that is to say, songs sung by the choir alone, as the choir's own offering of praise and glory to our Lord. The choir hopes that the music we share in this place serves to draw you closer to God. Now, let's sing today's psalm.

The Psalm or Gradual

The Second Reading from Scripture

The Gospel or Sequence Hymn

The Gospel

The Sermon

On the Role of the Sermon

It is significant to note that following the reading of the Gospel there is silence until the sermon – no other readings, prayers, or music. The sermon is of a piece with the readings and is a continuation of the proclamation of the Good News of Jesus Christ. The purpose of the sermon is to interpret the readings and apply them to the life of the congregation. It is not a pep talk, lecture, or piece of performance art; rather, it is a breaking open of the Word of God we have heard so that we can feed on it. Sometimes that feeding may refresh us; sometimes it may give us indigestion! Whatever the case may be, it should provoke a response in us – a response that will take shape in the remainder of the liturgy

and overflow into our daily lives where we bear witness to the Good News we have heard for the sake of the world, and not simply our own edification.

On the Affirmation of Faith

Let me quote from the Reverend Barbara Brown Taylor concerning the Nicene Creed, the Affirmation of Faith that we recite each Sunday:

"When I say, 'We believe...' I count on that to cover what I cannot believe on my own right now. When my faith limps, I lean on the faith of the church, letting 'our' faith suffice until mine returns. Later, when I am able to say, 'We believe...' with renewed confidence, I know that I am filling in for others who are indisposed for the time being, as they filled in for me. My decision to say the creed at all is a decision to trust those who have gone before me, embracing the faith they have commended to me."

So let us stand and proclaim our faith in the words of the Nicene Creed.

The Affirmation of Faith

On the Prayers of the People

All the pieces of the service fit together, they make sense as we get ready to come to the table to encounter God and then go out into the world. Each part leads logically to the next part to get that done.

The Prayers of the People happen after the sermon, where you are challenged about what you believe and right after the creed, where we say that what we believe, on the important things, is still the same. It's our first response to what we have heard, our response to the Gospel and the profession of our faith. That response says we care about people, about people hurting, about people in power, and that we want change in the world. We translate into prayer the needs of the world. We say we are part of the church universal, the big church. It comes before confession because we are about to recognize our limitations – that we don't always do the things we want to do or believe we should do. And that comes before absolution because that's where we get the garbage out of the way as we prepare to come to the table and open ourselves to receive the peace.

The Prayers of the People

On Confession and Absolution

Just as we intercede on behalf of the whole world in the Prayers of the People, so we confess our sins. For we confess not just as individuals, but as the body of Christ. We confess the ways in which all humanity, ourselves included, have missed the mark, failing to love God with our whole hearts and failing to love our neighbors as ourselves. In the words we are about to say, we confess on behalf of all God's children and ask for God's mercy and forgiveness. In the words we are about to hear in response, we are absolved and granted the grace of forgiveness not just once, but regularly, for we need the renewing power of God's forgiveness just as we need either food or water.

The Confession and Absolution

On the Peace

Having just exercised in our prayers our shared ministry of reconciliation, we now express and celebrate the peace to be found in hearing God's Word, and in responding to it. At the same time we prepare to offer our gifts at the altar by being reconciled to each other. Whether by words, a handshake, or an embrace, we greet in each other the Risen Christ who brought and still brings, the blessing of his peace.

The Peace

The Liturgy of the Table

On the Offertory

The Offertory serves as a reminder that God has formed us and given us all that we need – and now we have a chance to give back. Whenever we say Prayer D of the Great Thanksgiving we say: “From the gifts you have given us, this bread and this cup, we praise you and we bless you.”

Our gifts represent our life, our labor, and our love for each other – the fruits of our spirit shared in the community of the faithful. Notice the gifts that are being offered. The plates come forward, bearing our financial gift to sustain our mission and worship. On most Sunday's the choir offers its gift to the community in the form of an anthem. The congregation lifts its voice in song as a hymn of praise and mission is sung. The elements of the Eucharist, the gifts from the people, are brought down the aisle and given to the Deacon for use in the Holy Meal.

In other times we would bring offerings of canned goods or clothing when we are having special drives for the poor in our community. It's a time for flowers to be brought forward, children to bring drawings. It is a time when all our gifts are both recognized and welcomed in the place where we share our most powerful story – the Eucharistic Feast.

Notice the other things that happen as a part of Gathering the Gifts at the altar:

- The ushers taking up the offerings of the people
- The deacon preparing the table for the gifts to come forward
- The “Oblation Bearers” standing ready to bring the bread and wine forward

Here, the Deacon of the Mass talks about what is happening as s/he sets the Table.

The Offertory Hymn

On “The Great Thanksgiving”

Now that the gifts of bread and wine, the fruits of our lives, our labor, have been gathered upon the altar in offering to God, we begin the Great Thanksgiving. More, however, than just giving thanks, there is also a Great Remembering that takes place. Beginning with the Sursum Corda, the Presider asks the presence of God to be with the people, and bids the community to lift up their hearts into that presence. The people respond in kind by bidding the priest to do the same. Then, the worshipping community accepts its place among the whole company of heaven and earth to sing God’s praises in the Sanctus, or the hymn we call “Holy, Holy, Holy”. Then begins the remembering of the great offering that Jesus made on our behalf. It is important to keep in mind that this remembering is not a re-enactment of the Last Supper with the Presider “standing in” for Jesus. The Great Thanksgiving is a prayer – pay close attention – it is all addressed to God. And it is a prayer that we are ALL offering, and it is being led by the Priest that we have chosen from among God’s people for that purpose.

In this remembering that we do, we take up the bread and wine – simple, ordinary elements that are somehow not so ordinary anymore. Based on the Opening Grace from the Jewish Seder, this blessing of bread and wine roots us to our long heritage as a people of God. But Jesus, in his ministry, changed the meaning of these simple elements, and equated them with his body and blood that was soon to be broken. We recall Jesus’ command to remember him each time we partake of the bread and the wine. More importantly, we remember the greatest mystery of our faith... the mystery of Christ died, resurrected, and the promise of Christ’s return to us.

Once the remembering is done, we offer to God those gifts we have and ask him to make them and us holy so that not only may we be fed by those gifts, but so that we might feed others. The Bread in the Jewish Seder is referred to as the Bread of Affliction and once it is broken the charge is given, “let all who are hungry come and eat.” Remember this – after the bread is blessed and broken, God offers his own brokenness to us in the ordinary elements of bread and wine in order to strengthen us for the work we have ahead of us, to be Christ’s body in the world, to feed others as he has fed us.

The Great Thanksgiving

On The Lord’s Prayer

Affirming our heritage as the baptized daughters and sons of God we complete our Eucharistic prayer by reciting Christ’s prayer. In union with him, and as he taught us, we now pray...

The Lord’s Prayer

The Breaking of the Bread

The Invitation to the Table

The Post Communion Prayer

The Benediction

The Dismissal Rite

The Final Hymn

The Dismissal

The Postlude

Education

Discussion Guide preceding an Instructed Eucharist

- 1) How is the Holy made accessible through the liturgy?
- 2) How do you find God differently in corporate (public worship) and individual prayer?
- 3) Who picks the readings we hear each Sunday, and how are they selected?
- 4) Do you feel that liturgy connects you to your daily life, or to the life outside the Church?
- 5) What other questions do you have about things we do in liturgy?

Education

Discussion Questions following an Instructed Eucharist

- 1) How is the Holy made accessible through the liturgy?
- 2) When you are in a Sunday worship service do you feel like you are participating in it, or is it happening around you?
- 3) How has your understanding of liturgy changed with some of the explanation you heard in the Instructed Eucharist?
- 4) As interpretations of theology change, and new theologies are developed, should liturgy be changed or modernized? What are acceptable changes to liturgy, and what is “deep structure” that cannot be altered?
- 5) Discuss inclusiveness in liturgy. How is liturgy related to justice?
- 6) What other questions do you have about the way we worship together that have not been answered?