

INSTRUCTED EUCHARIST, RITE I

Part I: The Liturgy of the Word

August 28, 2005, 8:00am
St. Paul's, Fairfield
The Rev. Bennett A. Brockman

Go directly to pulpit or present from Celebrant's chair.

Welcome! Please be seated.

This morning our service will be different. From time to time people ask about the various parts of our worship, so we are offering an Instructed Eucharist today. I hope that these brief comments will deepen our experience of worship today and every Sunday.

I will present comments at several points during the service and these comments will take the place of the sermon.

Today our focus is on the first part of the service, which begins in the Book of Common Prayer on p. 323. This part of the service is titled "The Word of God," and its focus is on preparation for worship, on hearing and heeding Holy Scripture, and preparing to receive the Eucharist. In a few weeks, we will discuss the second part of the service, titled "The Holy Communion," which focuses on the bread and wine that become for us the Body and Blood of Christ.

FIRST COMMENT: Gather in the Lord's Name

Our first act of worship is known as the Entrance Rite. Whether marked by the singing of a hymn or by standing as the crucifer and clergy enter the church, we begin worship together, as one people, to signify that we are gathered together as Church, as the people of God known as Christians.

Our first words, the Opening Acclamation, remind us of who we are. They vary according to the season of the church year, emphasizing that we are: people who bless God, people who know the Resurrected Lord as Savior; people whose sins are forgiven.

Many of us make the sign of the cross when we say these words—as a sign of our baptism, as a way of enhancing our focus, as an affirmation of our identity as God’s people marked by the sign of the cross that we follow into church.

Our liturgy invites everyone to participate from beginning to end. Our liturgy is never meant to be offered by the priest alone but by everyone worshipping. In fact, the word *liturgy* means “the work of the people,” and in the Anglican tradition there must be at least one other person present before the priest can properly celebrate the Eucharist.

Then follows the Collect for Purity. Prior to 1552 it was recited silently by the priest. Now it invites us **all** to prepare our hearts for worship.

We conclude with the word “Amen,” a Hebrew word which means, “truth, certainty,” thus affirming what we have heard and said.

Our preparation continues as we hear (on p. 324) the Summary of the Law,” a quotation of Jesus’ words in Matthew 22: 37-40). It is a reminder of who we are called to be as God’s people in the world—as Church.

Then follows the ancient prayer still referred to in the Greek phrase, the *Kyrie eleison*. The following prayer, the *Trisagion*, or “thrice holy,” is a characteristic feature of the liturgy of the Orthodox tradition. Both petitions acknowledge that we who have just been reminded of the Law stand continually in need of God’s mercy.

Our worship then gathers momentum as we say or sing one of the oldest Christian hymns, the Gloria in Excelsis. By the 5th century, this song of pure praise was sung at every festal celebration of the

Eucharist. It is omitted in seasons of penitence, and it may be replaced by some other hymn of praise.

So we have gathered and demonstrated our unity as believers. We have acknowledged God's greatness and asked for God's mercy.

Thus prepared we make ourselves ready to hear God's Word. The priest salutes the congregation with the salutation and response translated from the ancient Latin Mass: "The Lord be with you: And with thy spirit."

The Collect of the Day follows the Salutation. Each Sunday, Feast Day, and notable occasion of the Church has its own collect. The word Collect registers the fact that these prayers *collect* (from Latin *col* + *legere*) several thoughts into one petition. Collects are assembled in the Prayer Book on pages 158-261. The priest says the Collect on behalf of everyone, and it is often related to a theme found in the scriptures for the day.

Now let us continue our worship by starting with the Opening Acclamation on p. 323. Please stand.

SECOND COMMENT: "PROCLAIM THE WORD OF GOD"
(after Collect of the Day; before the Old Testament reading)

Please be seated. We will read the Lesson momentarily.

When families gather they are likely to sit around and tell family stories. And this is what we do also when we gather as a Christian family. Our family stories are from Holy Scripture. Hearing them helps us remember who we are, where we came from, and where we are going. Listening to them calls to mind the presence of God who has called our Christian family into being and given our lives meaning through the life of Jesus and the Church.

The Bible is now the focus of our attention. One or Two *lessons*, another word for *readings*, are read and we make a response that acknowledges that we have heard God's word.

The first reading is usually from the Hebrew scripture, what the Christian Church calls the Old Testament. After the first lesson we may sing or say a Psalm, from the Bible's own hymnal, the Psalter.

When there is a second lesson, it comes from the epistles, or letters, written by the apostle Paul and other early Christian leaders. A lay minister called a lector reads the lesson.

Then, as a mark of respect toward the part of the Bible that tells the story of Jesus, we stand to hear the Gospel. *Gospel* is an Old English word that means "good news," a translation of the Greek word "evangel." The Good News we hear is that in Jesus, God reconciles the world to himself. Everything in the service so far has been pointing to this moment.

The book containing the Gospels is brought close to the people—a reminder that the Gospel is to be taken into the world we live in outside of church, in our hearts and minds and through our words and deeds.

We turn to face the Gospel book, to focus our attention. Often people make the sign of the cross over the forehead, the lips and the heart as the Gospel is announced. This is a prayer enacted rather than spoken. We are asking God to bless our minds, our speech and our hearts through the Good News of Jesus Christ.

*Our worship continues as the Lesson and the Gospel are read.
Please be seated for the Lesson.*

THIRD COMMENT: RESPONDING TO THE WORD (after the Gospel)

Please be seated.

Normally, we hear a sermon after the gospel. The Sermon explains the Gospel story, connects it to other lessons that may have been read, and most of all shows how the Gospel challenges and encourages us in our lives right now.

Today, this Instructed Eucharist of course takes the place of a sermon.

We often observe a moment of silence after the sermon and the readings from Scripture, for reflecting on what we have heard.

After hearing the Word of God applied to our lives in a sermon, our response *as a family gathered in Jesus' name* is to reaffirm the faith we share with generations of Christians, by saying the Nicene Creed. This Creed was written after months of intense debate at the Council of Nicea in 325 and gradually became part of services.

The Nicene Creed begins with “We believe...”—a statement that proclaims our God-given unity in shared faith. The alternative version of the Creed on p. 327 is an older translation with which many of us grew up. It uses the first-person—“I believe”—that was customary in the Middle Ages, when the priest would say the Creed alone. The plural “we believe” echoes the ancient form and rightly proclaims our shared belief.

[To the present day this Creed also is sadly a reminder of the divisions among Christians. The paragraph that discusses the Holy Spirit declares in our western statement that the Holy Spirit “proceeds from the Father and the Son,” a statement added in 589 to the original Nicene Creed. This clause has never been accepted by the Eastern Orthodox tradition.]

LET US NOW stand and say together the Nicene Creed.
Stay in pulpit.

THE FOURTH COMMENT: PRAY FOR THE WORLD AND FOR THE CHURCH *(after Creed, before Prayers of the People)*

The congregation may be seated.

Now we come to one of the oldest parts of public Christian worship: the Prayers of the People. In these prayers, the Christian body makes intercession before God for the needs of the Church and whole world. These prayers again remind us that we are the people of God in the world, and that through God's help we can be instruments of peace and healing in all aspects of our human lives, whether political, economic, social, or personal. The BCP offers 6 forms of the POP, and allows (see p. 383) for special prayers to be written for particular occasions.

To intercede for all who are in need of prayer is part of our work as God's people. The prayers remind us that our community includes the sick and the healthy, the rich and the poor, the powerful and the weak, the sorrowful and the joyful, the living and the dead. The prayers remind us that we are called to love and care for all.

Our preparation for communion continues with the reminder that our community includes the sinful, and that we number ourselves among them.

So there follows a time of self-examination and confession. We recall those times when we have not loved God or our neighbor fully, and remember the words of Jesus, who said "be reconciled to your brother" before you come to the altar (Mt. 5:23-24).

We experience our need for forgiveness and declare our personal and communal shortcomings, usually kneeling, which is the traditional posture for penitence.

The longer form of the Confession goes back to the Prayer Book of 1548. Until 1662 the priest said the Confession on behalf of the congregation.

The shorter form (which is also used in the Rite II Eucharist) was developed by an ecumenical group working at a time of liturgical renewal in the 1960's. It focuses less on the consequences of sin—God's wrath and our misery—and more on the fact of our failure to love God and each other.

The Absolution and the Comfortable Words follow. The priest declares that we are forgiven, loved, and free through God's abundant mercy. The absolution is a sacramental pronouncement, and the sentences from Scripture following it add assurance that all who repent are forgiven through God's abundant mercy and through our own faith in the saving work of Jesus Christ. Being freed from sin we are strengthened to do God's will.

Let us continue now with the Prayers of the People and Confession.

FIFTH COMMENT “Exchange the Peace of God”:

Please be seated.

Having confessed and been forgiven for our sins against God and each other, we are now equipped to exchange of the Peace of God with each other. This ritual goes back to New Testament times. It is not intended to be a casual, social gesture. Rather, it affirms the reconciliation God has just given us and is a sign of the peace bestowed by Christ on his disciples.

In the early church, anyone unwilling to exchange the peace with another member was disqualified from receiving Communion.

The original gesture was a “holy kiss,” the kiss of peace. Today, we use a variety of gestures depending on our comfort with them.

The Peace moves us forward to the Holy Communion, which we are now prepared to consecrate and to receive.

“The Peace of the Lord be always with you.”