

Rite I

Walk through a worship service

The narrator begins the service by reading the introductory commentary. The celebrant, other servers and choir (if any) will enter as usual after that opening narration.

Scotty: (from front of church)

During today's celebration of Holy Communion, I will offer a running commentary. We hope that this will give us all a deeper appreciation for what we do in our weekly celebration of the Eucharist.

This service is known as communion, for in it we commune with God and also with each other as the Body of Christ. It is also known as Eucharist, which is the Greek word meaning "Thanksgiving." In the Eucharist, we give thanks for what God has done for us through Jesus Christ.

The Eucharist is a service that sets aside time as we know it. The Eucharist brings both the past and the future to present reality as we remember Jesus' life, death and resurrection and await his coming again. The service is like a drama that we all enter. The first act of the drama is "The Liturgy of the Word." This first half of the service is based on Jewish worship, which preceded Christianity. God's mighty acts in

history are recalled through scripture and applied to our lives in the sermon. The second act of the drama is “The Liturgy of the Table.”

The liturgy is not something that the clergy does and the congregation watches. This can be seen in the word “liturgy” itself. Liturgy is a Greek word that comes from the root words for “people” and “work,” so the liturgy is “the work of the people.” The liturgy is something that we all do together. The liturgy is made of two parts - the ordinary and the propers. The ordinary is part of each and every service; the propers change with the seasons of the Christian year or for special services.

The service begins with an opening acclamation which is adapted from the Eastern Orthodox Church; we declare God and God’s kingdom as the goal of our Eucharistic journey.

Perry+: Opening Sentence
Opening Acclamation Rite I BCP p. 323

The first prayer is known as the collect for purity. For centuries, this collect for purity was said silently by the priest. The Prayer Book of 1552 made this prayer a public one said aloud by the priest for all the people

gathered. A collect is a particular form of prayer, which names some attribute of God or something God has done, asks for something specific and then closes with praise to God.

Collect for Purity

The first American Book of Common Prayer published in 1789 used this Summary of the Law in place of the reciting of the Ten Commandments.

Summary of the Law

In the Roman/Western tradition, the Gloria in Excelsis was only used on festive days where the Pope celebrated the Eucharist. Then in the 11th century when the Gloria became customary on Sundays and feast days. However, the Gloria is not used in the Seasons of Lent and Advent. During Lent and Advent we use alternate opening prayers, the Kyrie or the Trisagion.

Song of Praise Rite I BCP p. 324

Next follows the collect of the day. The collect reflects a custom dating from the 5th century in Egyptian Christian monasteries, where, after a time of offering petitions, the concerns expressed by the monks

were “collected” by the Abbot into one final prayer. This prayer is written to go along with both the season of the church year and the readings for the day. Silence is an important part of worship. At times in the collects and prayers, we will have a period of silence.

Collect Rite I BCP p. 165

Reading and commenting on scripture goes back to the earliest services of Christianity. Following the pattern of Jewish synagogue worship, readings follow a set pattern. This is known as a lectionary. The Christian communities began to add letters of Paul and others to their service. It was these readings that became in time our New Testament. Our pattern is to read a portion of the Old Testament, followed by a portion of a Psalm and then a reading from a New Testament epistle, or letter, and finally the Gospel is read. Our response of “Thanks be to God” acknowledges that we have heard the reading and are thankful for the Word of God.

This four-fold reading is prescribed as a three-year cycle of readings. 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; and in 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.

We are now in Year A of the Revised Common Lectionary, and this is the 24th Sunday in the season of Pentecost.

First, we have a reading from the Hebrew Scriptures, which are the parts of the Bible we share with our Jewish brothers and sisters. This part of the Bible reflects the faith and prayers and thoughts and deeds of the patriarchs and prophets who lived before Jesus.

Old Testament Lesson

Next we read from the psalms. The oldest songs of the family of God are called Psalms, and we sing or say them.

Psalm

The following lesson we will hear is usually taken from one of the letters written by people like Paul, Peter or John to members of the

Christian family in places which they had visited. We call it an Epistle, from the Latin word for letter.

Epistle

The word gospel means good news, and it is good news because it's about Jesus. That's also what makes it the most important reading, and we honor its importance by standing to hear it read. The Deacon's role is to be the Evangelist of the Word or Gospeller, so the Deacon reads the Gospel. When there is no Deacon, a Priest is the Gospeller.

Gospel

If there's something that we want to have explained to us, we turn to our parents or older brothers and sisters, or to our most trusted friends. That's why now the head of our parish family, or someone else in his or her place, will give what is called "the sermon" to explain to us what we have just heard in the lessons. Scriptural teaching is rooted in the ministry of Jesus our Rabbi/ Teacher and has been required in every Book of Common Prayer. A shorter sermon is called a homily. Today, our sermon is the narrative of the Eucharist.

The Sermon

Originally the entire service was viewed as our confession of faith. But, since the Sixth Century, the church has recited the Nicene Creed at the Eucharist. The word “creed” comes from the Latin *credo* for “I believe.” In the words of the creed, we express together the faith we hold in common. At times in our lives when doubt and fear take hold, we can still say “we believe” for the community continues to believe for us. We then respond to all that we have heard by saying that we believe it. This particular Creed was written at a place called Nicea in what is now Turkey in the year 325, and later modified in 381. Now we stand and say it together to show we share this faith with millions of Christians who lived before us. The tradition of turning to face the altar while reciting the creed is a holdover from Colonial-era America when both the Lord’s Prayer and the Creed were printed on boards mounted on the far wall of the church.

The Creed Rite I BCP p. 331

Now we pray for ourselves and particularly on behalf of others. The prayer book offers different forms for these prayers, but the Prayers of the

People always contain six elements:

One, we pray for the whole church, its members and its mission; two we pray for our nation and those in authority; three we pray for the welfare of the world; four we pray for the concerns of our local community; five we pray for those who suffer or are in trouble; and six we pray for the dead. The current text is similar to Thomas Cranmer's 1552 Book of Common Prayer with the notable revision to pray for "those who bear the authority of government" in place of the prayer to "save and defend thy servant Edward our king, that under him we may be godly and quietly governed." The prayers for those who have died are an ancient tradition. Interestingly, the 1928 Book of Common Prayer featured a new twist in theology, common to that book, by praying for "continual growth in thy love and service" for those who have died.

Prayers of the People

The Prayers of the People are followed by the confession of sin. We ask God's forgiveness for things done and things left undone. Private confession is not required in our church. However, for those particularly

in need of unburdening themselves of past wrongs, private confession is offered. It can be an especially comforting way to turn away from past wrongs and set out on a new path. But most of the time we only need this time of prayer together as a community to recall our sins and to ask for God's forgiveness.

The bidding we use on the first Sunday of each month dates from the 1548 Order of Communion which preceded the first Book of Common Prayer. It sets forth three conditions: earnest repentance, love for one's neighbor, and the intention to lead a new life. "Draw near with faith" literally meant a movement from the nave to the chancel.

The confession we use on the first Sunday also stems from the 1548 Order. It is a shortened version of a confession in one of the three liturgies used to write the Prayer Book in 1549.

The priest, in giving absolution assures us that all who make sincere confession are forgiven by God. The grace of forgiveness flows from the person of Christ (Mark 2:5-11). This version of the Absolution comes from the 1549 Book of Common Prayer which also comes from the

liturgies used to form the Prayer Book, the Sarum Rite, used at Salisbury Cathedral in England.

*Confession of Sin
Absolution*

All editions of the Book of Common Prayer feature these comforting words. The use of “comfortable words” dates from the first reformed service in Strassburg, Germany, on February 16, 1524.

The Comforting Sentences

In the early centuries of the Christian Church, unbelievers could not stay for the rest of the service. Visitors or those planning to be baptized would be asked to leave at this point as only the baptized persons who took part in it could see the Eucharist. After the visitors left, the Christians would greet each other with “the kiss of peace.”

Now, though, visitors or those planning to be baptized are not asked to leave. Everyone is invited to stay for the entire service and participate. We earnestly believe that the Sacrament of Holy Communion is a means of grace, and God’s grace is available to everyone at all times.

Today at The Peace, we shake hands or hug. There are no set words

to use in greeting each other, but “Peace,” God’s peace,” or Peace be with you” are all commonly used.

The Peace

At this point in the service and before we begin the second act, we customarily remind each other of events affecting our congregation, we recognize birthdays, anniversaries or other major events in the life of the parish family.

Announcements

Now we come to the second act in the drama with the Liturgy of the Table. It is this portion that follows Jesus’ command to his disciples to remember his last meal with them each time they gather. The second portion of the service is based on Jewish Fellowship meals, particularly the Passover observance. But this second half of the service is not communion in and of itself. It is the whole service, both acts of the drama, that comprise the Eucharist.

This second act begins with the offertory. Here we give back to God from the gifts God has given us. That is what is meant by the offertory sentence said by the Celebrant.

Offertory

In the early centuries of the church, Christians brought bread and wine with them. What was needed in the service was consecrated for use, while the rest of the bread and wine was set aside for deacons to take to the poor in the area. Today, a portion of our offering continues to help people in need around our community and around the world.

Our offering is the first of four actions in the Eucharist. Just as scripture tells us that Jesus took, blessed, broke and gave the bread and wine, so this first of our four actions is for the Deacon to take the bread and wine. After the bread and wine are received, the table will be prepared by the Deacon. Deacons are also called to service. When there is no Deacon, a Priest prepares the Table.

The water and wine are mingled, as was the practice with Jewish table wine. It has also come to remind us of the blood and water that poured from Jesus' side after his death on the cross.

As monetary gifts and packaged gifts are presented, we say a hymn of praise and thanks to God.

The Great Thanksgiving
Offertory Doxology

Our earliest document of a Eucharist dates from 215, and our present prayers follow much of that form, which has been passed down through the years. That history—and the scriptural basis for it—is why communion services from other denominations are similar to the ones we use. Their origins are the same.

Thomas Cranmer, in using the opening lines of the 5th century Divine Liturgy of St. John Chrysostom, proclaimed that in the celebration and reception of the Lord’s Supper, our minds are drawn away from earthly things; and we ascend to heaven to participate in Christ there.

Our Eucharistic prayers start with a brief description of why it is “meet and right” to give God thanks and praise on this day.

Sursum Corda

While the Eastern Orthodox Church features the unchanging Eucharistic liturgy of St. John Chrysostom each Sunday, the Roman churches of the West contained a Proper Preface which centers on the particular commemoration of the day.

The Proper Preface

We then sing or say the *Sanctus*, an ancient song and a heavenly song, for according to Isaiah 6:1-3 and Revelation 4:8, angels constantly sing this song to God.

As we lift up our hearts and join in the song of heaven, we enter the Eucharistic feast not with God coming down to us for God is already here. Instead through our prayers of thanks, we are lifted up to the realm of the saints where we join in their hymn of praise.

Sanctus

When we gather together we remember Jesus. 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. While the bread and wine remain the bread and wine, they are not unchanged. The significance of the bread and wine changes radically for those who partake of them. Though they remain ordinary bread and wine, the elements of communion become the outward signs of inward grace. That grace, or gift from God, is Jesus' real presence

in the Eucharist through the power of the Holy Spirit. The real presence of Christ is a full statement of our belief in God as a Trinity of persons.

This real presence is not the result of a magical incantation on the part of the priest. No set of words makes Eucharist happen. It is the whole action taken together that affects the Eucharist: the gathered community of faith remembering Jesus' last meal with his disciples and calling on the Holy Spirit to transform the gifts of bread and wine into spiritual food and drink. It is God's action that makes the Eucharist.

Our remembering itself has a spiritual side that can't be missed. It's called *anamnesis*, which is the exact opposite of amnesia. When we have amnesia, we forget who we are and where we came from. With *anamnesis*, we remember in such a way as to bring Christ's death and resurrection alive again in vivid, spiritual, even mystical ways—ways in which the power of Jesus life and sacrifice 2,000 years ago is clear and alive today.

Against the medieval Catholic teaching that Jesus was sacrificed at every mass, Cranmer rewrote the anamnesis to proclaim that the cross

was the one and only sacrifice that saves us from sin and death.

Using the words from the Last Supper found in Mark (14:22-24), Luke (22:19-20) Matthew (26:26-28), and 1 Corinthians (11:23-26), the Institution Narrative has been a feature of every Eucharist since the end of the 4th century.

Words of Institution

Oblation means offering. Irenaeus, a 2nd century Bishop and great teacher in the Church, spoke of the Eucharist as an offering to God. We offer our gifts of praise as well as the elements of bread and wine.

The Oblation

The *epiklesis* is the prayer that the Spirit might bless the bread and wine. Careful to avoid transubstantiation, Cranmer teaches that only in receiving communion do we spiritually eat Christ's body and blood.

The Invocation (Epiklesis)

Having prayed for the Holy Spirit's presence in the *epiklesis*, we now ask for various benefits of the Spirit.

Since the early church in the 1st and 2nd centuries, prayers for the unity of the church, for those gathered, and for the strengthening of faith

have been lifted up as well as prayers for the dead. In reaction to indulgences and offering masses for the dead, Cranmer pointedly removed all references to the dead.

The Supplications

The 1549 Book of Common Prayer used this Trinitarian ending from the Roman Rite.

The Doxology

As the prayers of thanksgiving and offering conclude, the people join in and give their consent by saying AMEN, which means, "I agree," or "So be it." Notice in your prayer books that this AMEN is capitalized, to steer the congregation toward an emphatic agreement of the prayers.

The Great Amen

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 us through each day. And as a part of that, the bread also symbolizes God's presence, which is something that is also essential to our getting through the day. The Lord's Prayer was only added to the Eucharistic service in

400 AD. Previously the prayer was used as a personal devotion. This version comes from Matthew 6:9-13.

The Lord's Prayer

The Priest now breaks the bread, the third and fourth of the four actions. The priest has already taken and blessed the bread and wine. Now she (or he) will break it.

The Breaking of the Bread, called the Fraction, is an *action* in the service that reminds us that our strength and our hope come from the willingness of Jesus to be broken for us on the cross. His act of self-giving is meant to always draw our hearts back to the heart of God. Sacraments are meant to be tangible signs of God's grace. After the Fraction, we either sing or say what is known as a Fraction Anthem, attesting to the self-giving love of God in Christ.

The Breaking of Bread

Since Thomas Cranmer taught Christ's presence in the faithful reception of the elements, he crafted this prayer from Mark 7:28, the Liturgy of St. Basil, and John 6:56 to emphasize the receiving of

communion as the very center of the rite.

The Prayer of Humble Access

Called the *Sancta Sanctis*, the invitation comes from the 4th century Eastern Orthodox, “Holy things for holy people.” The Priest now invites the congregation to come and receive the elements of bread and wine. They are the free gifts of God for all people. In the Episcopal Church, all baptized persons are invited to receive communion.

Invitation

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 in the wine. Dipping the bread in the wine and consuming the bread and wine together is called intinction. Anyone who has not been baptized, or who does not wish to receive communion, may either wait in their seat, or come forward for a blessing. If you come forward for a blessing, please cross your arms over your chest in an “X” to signify your intention.

No one has a full understanding of Holy Communion; it’s part of the

mystery of faith. An analogy to consider is that we learn to speak a language before we learn to read it or write it. Language becomes part of us before we fully understand it. So it is with faith, first at baptism, and then through communion.

Some of our communion is set aside each week to take to the sick and shut-ins. If you or someone you know would like to have communion brought to them, you can ask the priest to make arrangements. When you can't come to church, the church can come to you.

Communion

After Constantine's conversion, the large numbers of people joining the Church led to a need to develop a post communion thanksgiving prayer. This form comes from the 1549 Book of Common Prayer and gathers up all the meanings of Holy Communion: thanksgiving, mystery, grace, incorporation in Christ, fellowship in the church, and anticipation of the Kingdom.

The post communion prayer is the first prayer where we are not asking God to do something for us or for somebody else. It is not a prayer

to help those who are sick or to cleanse us so we come into God's presence at the table. It is the prayer that comes after that, where we just ask for power to do what we believe in the world. It says we have been made whole, it acknowledges who we are, so let us do what we need to do in the world, not just in this church. We move out to be God's hands and heart in the world.

Post-Communion Prayer

Since ancient times, it has been customary for the Bishop or Priest to bless the congregation at the conclusion of the service. The blessing has been a part of the service since the 4th century. This version was written by Cranmer and first appeared in the 1549 Book of Common Prayer.

Blessing

We partake in the Eucharist and are spiritually nourished, but it is not for our benefit alone. Communion enables us to return to the world with renewed vigor to proclaim the Gospel in our words and in our lives. In the Eucharist, Christ's presence both nourishes us and challenges us. As the celebration ends, we are charged to "Let us go forth in the name of Christ..." The Eucharist is therefore not an exclusive gathering that

separates us from the world, but a challenge to reach out beyond our own church to the world around us. While the Dismissal started in the 4th century, the 1979 Book of Common Prayer is the first to restore its use.

Dismissal

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Thanks to St. Elisabeth's Episcopal Church, Memphis, Tennessee for their version of the Instructed Eucharist.