

Instructed Eucharist

By the Rev. Philip Major

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The Entrance Rite, Collects, Collect for Purity, and Canticle

Good morning and welcome to St. Paul's Church. Our worship this morning is arranged as an instructed Eucharist.

The word liturgy means 'the work of the people', so we are all participants in the liturgy. Since I can't offer a play by play commentary like they do during football games I will be interrupting the flow of the action five times during the service in order to talk about the activities which have just taken place or that are about to occur. This will take the place of the sermon.

There are scriptural, theological, historical and practical reasons behind each of the activities of our worship. The pattern of our worship is based on the very first Book of Common Prayer which was written in 1549. That prayer book was based upon the ancient traditions of the church. You might think it would be impossible to know much about the ancient traditions of the church. As it happens, about 60 years after Jesus' time a group of Christians wrote an instruction manual for their worship services. A copy of this instruction manual was discovered 125 years ago, and was given the name 'Didache', which is Greek for the word 'teaching'. Much of what we do today is based upon the 'Didache'. The 'Didache' was based in large part on the Jewish worship services that were familiar to the first followers of Christ. So you can think of the traditions in our prayer book being 500 years old, or 2000 years old, or maybe even 2500 years old.

Our entrance rite is based on scripture and on traditions that go back to the Roman era. In Mark chapter 9 Jesus tells his disciples that they must be servant leaders, saying: 'Whoever wants to be first must be last of all and servant of all.' So in our processions the order is reversed from what people expect. In our entrance rite the cross comes first, because the cross is the most important thing. Our processional crosses are beautiful, but the cross is not about glory; it is about suffering and salvation. The Eucharistic Ministers and the Priest are last in the procession because traditionally the last positions in the procession were for the slaves or the servants.

You might have noticed that the priest and other ministers bow in the direction of the altar as we approach the front of the church. We are not actually bowing in reverence to the altar but to the consecrated bread and wine that are kept next to the altar. There are no exact rules about when and how to do this, but many people reverence the sacraments when they enter the church and when they leave.

During our worship we will have some prayers which are a type of prayer called a 'collect'. A collect always follows a particular four part form. It is often said at the end of a set of prayers, usually by the person who is leading worship. You can think of it as collecting all of the prayers that precede it into a single expression.

The **Collect of the Day** changes each week and summarizes the themes of the day, in this case the 20th Sunday after Pentecost. But one of our collects remains the same each week. It is the prayer that comes next in our worship service. It is called the **Collect for Purity**. Six hundred years ago this prayer was said by the priest alone as he was preparing for the worship service. The first Book of Common Prayer, written in 1549, moved this prayer into the worship service, but it was still said by the priest alone. Now, in the 21st century, at St. Paul's we invite the entire congregation to say the Collect for Purity together. This is a good example of the way our service is traditional but at the same time changes in harmony with our changing understandings of God. We continue our worship with our Opening Acclamation.

The Lectionary and the Psalm

Our scripture lessons are not chosen by the priest or by anyone at St. Paul's. They are taken from the Revised Common Lectionary. The Revised Common Lectionary was created by leaders of Methodist, Lutheran, Episcopal and other churches. The main idea of the lectionary is to tell long portions of the stories told in the Old and New Testaments. Especially in our Old Testament readings the story often continues over a period of many weeks. Our lectionary is organized in a three year cycle. Over the course of three years we hear most of the New Testament and large portions of the Old Testament. Then the cycle repeats. You might think of the **Psalms** as the first hymnal of the church. Like many other portions of the Hebrew Scriptures the words of the Psalms are poems. The language is rich and figurative, but the truths of these and other poems in scripture go far beyond simple, literal meanings.

You may notice that some participants make the sign of the cross during the reading of the **Gospel** and at other moments during the service. This is a physical way of responding to the words and activities of the liturgy and a way of reminding ourselves Jesus' way is the way of the cross. There are no exact rules about exactly how and when to make the sign of the cross.

There are two places that are among the most important parts of the service and that are good places to make the sign of the cross on your chest. They are also easy to remember because they are the two places where I make the sign of the cross. The first will be at the end of the confession. As I say the words of the **Absolution** I will make the sign of the cross with two fingers. The second is during the invocation of the Spirit just before the Lord's Prayer. You will see me make the sign of the cross, using my first and second fingers to touch my forehead, then my chest, then my left shoulder, then my right shoulder.

The Creed, Prayers of the People, Confession & Absolution, and the Peace

The Nicene Creed is one of the newest parts of our liturgy. The use of the Nicene Creed during worship began about 550 years after Jesus' time in an attempt to settle questions about the divine and human nature of Christ. The rest of this portion of the liturgy is much older. Earlier this morning I told you about the Didache, the Instruction Manual for Christian Worship that was created about the same time as the Gospel of John. Directions for **the Prayers of the People, the Confession** and the **Peace** are found in the Didache.

The Peace sometimes feels like a social time, especially good for greeting visitors and familiar friends. But I encourage us to remember the theological foundations for the exchange of the Peace immediately before the Communion portion of the service. The main idea of communion is that Christ reconciles us with God. This reconciliation is symbolized in the breaking and distribution of the bread. But scripture teaches us that we can't really be reconciled with God if we are at war with one another. So the Peace is especially intended as a time for us to be reconciled with each other. During the Peace we have the opportunity to reach out to people who may have become separated from us in some way, whether through our actions or through our lack of action.

The Offertory, the Seven Parts of the Eucharistic Prayer, the Lord's Prayer, the Fraction

If you have read 1 Corinthians chapter 11 you have seen one clue that the first generations of disciples celebrated the Lord's Supper like we do. But the communion services of the first generations of disciples were different from ours in the fact that they did not use written forms for their **Eucharistic Prayers**. Almost all of our Eucharistic Prayers follow a pattern that includes seven parts. You can see these seven parts of the Eucharistic Prayer are outlined in your leaflet on pages 13, 14 and 15.

Like many other parts of our worship service, our singing of the **Sanctus** is related to the use of this text in Jewish prayers. The word **Anamnesis** might remind you of a word you have heard before. Amnesia is the act of forgetting important details of life. Anamnesis is the opposite. Anamnesis is a deep form of

remembering. During the Anamnesis we remember Jesus words and actions, but we try to remember in a way that closes the distance between us and Jesus.

During the **Oblation** we offer the bread and the wine back to God. This helps us remember God has given us everything we have. During the **Invocation** we pray for God's Spirit to be upon us and upon the bread and the wine. Our prayer is that we and the bread and the wine would somehow be changed by the Holy Spirit. You will notice that I make the sign of the cross on my chest when I say the words, *Send your Holy Spirit upon us that we might live in you as you live in us.*

The **Fraction** is the moment when the communion bread is broken. This action brings together two ideas. The first is that we are broken. The second is that God was broken in order to reconcile us to God. For me and for many people, this is the most important moment in our liturgy. We have no words to fully describe what is happening, so we observe this sacred action with a time of complete silence.

The Post-Communion Prayer, Blessing, Dismissal and Announcements

After we have received communion we are ready to be sent out into the world, so these last parts of the liturgy are brief and to the point. We have located our **announcements** here at the end of the liturgy because announcements are about things that are happening after our worship service. Our **prelude** and **postlude** are part of worship. This means two things:

1. The postlude is not a performance, but a musical offering, so we don't applaud.
2. We keep silence. Some people are praying during this time. Please be respectful of this time of our worship. If you need to leave prior to the end of the postlude, please do so quietly.