

Instructed Eucharist Rite I

Narrator: For over 2000 years gathering to celebrate Eucharist has been the central act of worship for Christians. Christians across the world and down through the ages gather, as we do today, to offer thanks. At one level the Prayer Book celebration of Holy Eucharist is very simple. The clergy and people gather, scriptures are read, a sermon is preached, prayers are offered, bread and wine are brought to the table, thanks is given to God, a meal is shared and the people go forth into the world. That pattern for worship has existed since the second century.

It seems then that in the Episcopal Church all one need to do is open the Book of Common Prayer to the right page and follow along. Worship though is action based. Liturgical worship is defined as "the action of the people." The word Eucharist is Greek meaning "to give thanks." So celebrating Eucharist is not something the priest does rather it is the action of the community of faith as a whole giving thanks to God.

Since the revision of the Anglican book in 1662, there have been options available for use when celebrating Eucharist. The current prayer book, authorized for our use in 1979, provides a number of options and resources for celebrating Eucharist in different ways. For example, in addition to two rites for Eucharist, there are six versions of the prayers of the people and eight Eucharistic prayers. This provision for variety allows for flexibility to meet the changing needs and circumstances of the world. The Prayer Book options provide for worship to be the action of the people. We do not come to be entertained; we come to share as a community of faith in worship.

Preparation for the celebration of the Eucharist begins long before you or I enter this church building. The altar guild prepares the altar with the vessels and elements that we need to worship.

The altar is a table. In this building the original altar is located in the side chapel and looks more like a table than the fancy "high altar." On the altar the altar guild places a fair linen made with specifications that fit the particular altar. A fair linen is like a very fine table cloth that you might place on the dining room table when a special guest is coming to dinner. There are two candlesticks on the altar known as Eucharistic Lights. They were used at one time to provide the light needed to read the service from

the altar book. Today they remind us that we are gathered to celebrate Eucharist and you will notice these candles are not lit for other liturgical services.

The service book placed on the altar is called a "missal." The missal contains the various forms of the Eucharistic service along with "rubrics." Rubrics meaning "red" are instructions to the celebrating priest. You will find rubrics in italics in your Prayer Book.

Let's look at the rubrics on page 323 for example. You will note that a hymn, psalm or anthem may be sung to begin the service. Then the people standing, the Celebrant may open with the various greetings. Rubrics give us direction for our celebration of the Eucharist.

The altar guild places a folded placemat, called a corporal, in the center of the altar to catch any crumbs or spills as communion is prepared. The chalice or common cup is placed in the middle of the corporal. A purificator, which is like a napkin, is placed over the chalice. The paten or bread plate is then placed on top of the chalice. The purificator prevents the vessels from marking each other and reduces the opportunity for clanging as communion is prepared. On the paten a priest's host, a large piece of unleavened bread, is placed for the fraction. A pall, a stiff piece of cardboard covered in cloth, is placed on the paten. The pall gives shape to the veil which covers the altar vessels. The veil is in the color of the liturgical season and normally matches the altar hangings. A burse which is like a pocket is placed on the veil containing extra purificators, should they be needed.

To the side of the altar is a credence. This shelf or table is covered with a cloth. On the credence is placed extra bread and wine for communion. Also on the credence are a lavabo bowl, water and a towel to be used by the celebrant prior to communion. The alms basins used by the ushers to collect our offerings are placed under the credence.

Behind the high altar in this building is a shelf known as a retable. In the middle of the retable is a cross flanked on either side by flowers for decoration. Office lights are then placed on both sides of the cross so light is made available for all services that do not include celebrating Eucharist. The altar guild makes sure that the now mentioned items are in place on the altar, credence and retable prior to worship.

Have you ever wondered why leaders of worship in the Episcopal Church wear vestments? Vestments are derived from ancient street wear. The priest is dressed in a white vestment known as an "alb." This vestment is derived from an under garment. The alb is girded with a cincture or rope. The stole worn by the clergy is a sign of office. The stole is worn over the shoulder by a deacon and draped around the neck of a priest or bishop. The stole is in the color of the liturgical season and normally matches the altar hangings. The Celebrant wears a chasuble also in the liturgical color. The chasuble is a large oval garment with no sleeves. It represents the royal robe the soldiers placed on Jesus before they had him scourged. Similarly, the choir and lay ministers are dressed in a black cassock and white surplis. Vestments assist us not to be distracted by the clothing worn by worship leaders.

The Celebrant at a Eucharist is a priest of the church unless the Bishop is present, in which case the Bishop presides. A Eucharistic Minister sometimes known as a chalice is licensed by the Bishop to assist the priest at the altar. A lector is a person trained to read the lessons, lead us in reciting the psalm when it is not sung and read the prayers of the people. Altars servers, better known as acolytes, are trained to assist the priest in the preparation of the altar for communion. A crucifer bears the cross for processions assisted by torch bearers and banner bearers. The organist and choir lead us in the musical portions of the service. Ushers assist us to be seated, collect our offerings and assist us coming to and from the altar for communion.

As we enter the church building, the time prior to the start of the service is meant to be a time of quiet centering. Many people choose to use this time for prayer. You will find prayers in the Prayer Book on page 834 to be used before receiving communion. The clergy and worship leaders say a prayer before entering the church that is known as a "choir prayer."

During the Lenten season of forty days prior to the Easter feast, we are reminded to engage in self reflection, self discipline, and repentance. During the season at St. John we use Rite I for both services. Rite I has a more penitential tone to the prayers and invites reflection. We begin with silence and continue in silence as the worship leaders enter. The Penitential Order

is used at the beginning of the service to set the tone for our worship. The congregation stands for the opening salutation on page 319. Note the rubric in the middle of the page tells us we may say the Decalogue beginning on page 317 kneeling. The Celebrant may then read one of the passages from Scripture on page 319 and 320 before inviting us to the Confession of our sins. As individuals and as a community we fail to remain at one with God and to live in love and charity with our neighbors. We confess as a community those things that separate us from God and from each other. A priest then stands to pronounce Absolution to God's people. The Absolution is a declaration of God's forgiveness of our shortcomings. We kneel for the Confession and Absolution.

The rubrics on page 321 then tell us that the liturgy continues with the Kyrie eleison, Lord have mercy upon us on page 324. The Kyrie is an ancient Greek prayer asking God to have mercy on us and help us. The Collect of the Day sets the tone for what follows. For each Sunday of the liturgical year there is a set of what are known as "Propers" consisting of a collect for the day and readings from Scripture. The Celebrant introduces the Propers with "The Lord be with you." We respond, "And with thy spirit." This is a good example of liturgical worship. The priest says something and everyone responds - liturgical worship is the work of all of God's people. At the end of the prayer we say "Amen" meaning "so be it" or I agree.

The Celebrant leads the first portion of the service to the reading from Scripture.

Narrator: The title at the top of page 323 identifies the first part of our celebration as "The Word of God." The focus is on readings from the Bible. The first reading that we hear is from the Hebrew Scripture or Old Testament. There is a theme that runs through the appointed readings for each Sunday. The revelation of God's interaction with the people of God as recorded in Scripture continues to inform our lives today. At the conclusion of the reading the lector says, "Hear what the Spirit is saying to God's people." By the power of God's Spirit we continue to be open to God's revelation as we hear and inwardly digest the reading of Scripture.

The reading or chanting of a Psalm serves as a gradual hymn to move us from the Hebrew Scripture to the reading from the New Covenant. The first of the New Covenant readings is from one of the letters or epistles. The

Epistles were the first written documents of the early Christians. These letters address concerns faced by the church as well as statements of faith to assist early believers to find their way.

There is a Sequence hymn between the reading of the Epistle and the proclamation of the Gospel. Music in worship allows the leaders to move from place to place as the liturgy progresses. If you pay attention while singing, you will notice preparations being made for the next portion of the liturgy. The Gospel is proclaimed from the midst of the congregation. We stand for the proclamation of the Gospel and surround the reading with words of praise.

The sermon that follows is intended to interpret the Scripture readings highlighting the continual presence and revelation of God in our lives. We are seated for the sermon and other portions of the liturgy intended to provide instruction.

Following the sermon there is a moment of silence to allow time for reflection before we stand to reaffirm our faith. The Nicene Creed used in this celebration is a combination of two ecumenical councils. Creeds are statements of what we believe as communities of faith, therefore we begin the creed with the words: "We believe." As a statement of faith, the creeds describe God and how we believe God is revealed to us. Contained in the creed is a statement about how God interacts with God's people, the church, and what we believe about the church. The church is universal, it is in relationship with God and across time and space with all who walk in faith. We stand together to recite the statement of our faith or Creed.

The Prayer for the Whole State of Christ's Church and the World follows the Creed. This prayer is a summary of requests for the church, our country, those with specific needs and the departed. The Prayer Book allows for us to stand or kneel for this prayer. Standing to pray is the practice of the synagogue and early Christian Church expressing a corporate witness of what is being said. In early Christian Churches and in many churches in Europe today, there are no pews or kneelers. People stood together shoulder to shoulder to worship God. Kneeling to pray is first found in the 1552 Anglican Prayer Book. A declaration on kneeling, known as the Black Rubric, was inserted into the Prayer Book without the consent of Parliament. A Lector or Eucharistic Minister leads us in prayers for the church and the world.

When we are not using the Penitential Order, the Confession and Absolution follow the prayers. The Comfortable Words on page 332 are sentences from Scripture to assure us of God's promise to forgive those who come seeking forgiveness. The rubric allows that one or more of these sentences may be read by the minister. Standing we are invited by the Celebrant to greet one another in the name of the Lord. The words we use remind us that God's peace abides with us and among us.

The Celebrant continues with the readings from Scripture through the Peace.

Narrator: We have reached a pivotal point in the service. The readings from Scripture remind us that God is active in our lives and that we are bound to one another through our Lord Jesus Christ. We have confessed that we have not always lived in a loving relationship with God and with our neighbor. We have been assured that God forgives us and we can live in a different way. We exchanged greetings of God's peace with one another, not as a break in the service rather as a way of acting out our unity in Christ. Now the focus is turned from the reading of Scripture to the Lord's Table.

Recall that we said the word "Eucharist" means "to give thanks." Following offertory sentences we gratefully present offerings of money, symbols of our labors, to be used by the church community to do God's work in the world. We also offer gifts of bread and wine, fruits of the earth over which God has created us to be stewards. As we present our gifts we are reminded that, "All things come of thee, O Lord, and of thine own have we given thee."

While our alms are being received by the ushers, the priest assisted by an acolyte prepares the altar for communion. The acolyte hands the priest bread in a vessel known as a ciborium. The ushers have counted people as they arrive to worship. The ushers tell the acolyte how many people are present so the proper number of wafers can be prepared for communion. Wafers are unleavened bread, a reminder of the time God's people were fed by God in the wilderness.

Wine and water are mixed in the chalice. This mixing of wine and water comes from Jewish table custom. Some interpret the mixing of wine and water as a symbol of the divine and human united in Christ. After receiving our alms, during the singing of an offertory hymn the priest makes final

preparation of the communion table. The priest then washes his hands, a symbolic act of being made clean to stand before God on behalf of the people.

Continue with offertory sentences through presentation of alms.

Narrator: Having offered our gifts to God, we now move to the second part of the Eucharistic action. This involves prayers and blessing. We begin with the Jewish responsive verses: "Lift up your hearts." These phrases that we repeat together are known as the Sursum Corda. A seasonal preface depending on the season of the Liturgical Year follows introducing the Sanctus. Seasonal prefaces begin on page 345 in the Prayer book. We respond with words of praise, "Holy, Holy, Holy Lord....."

The Great Thanksgiving is not just a prayer to consecrate the bread and wine. It is a reminder that Christ's real presence abides with us always. In the act of giving thanks we are made one with Christ and with one another. In this context, we remember Christ's redeeming act by recalling his action at the Last Supper with his disciples. We invoke the blessing of God's Spirit on the bread and wine and on us. This prayer known as the Great Thanksgiving emphasizes our oneness with God. The Lord's Prayer said at the end of the Prayer of Consecration sums all we have prayed using the words that Jesus taught us.

Notice on page 334 the rubric in the middle of the page gives the following instruction: "The people kneel or stand." In Rite II you will find the order reversed: The preferred posture in each particular rite is the first one mentioned. Rite I having a more penitential tone directs us to kneel before God. The rubrics on page 334 direct the Celebrant to hold or place a hand upon the bread and wine while repeating the words of consecration. You will note people making the sign of the cross at the words invoking God's blessing. Practices such as crossing one's self to symbolize the receiving of absolution or a blessing are acts of personal piety.

At the first Eucharistic feasts bread was broken for distribution. Christians later interpreted that as a symbol of Christ's body broken for us. This is symbolized today by the breaking of the larger Priest's Host, known as the Fraction. Silence is directed to be kept for a moment to allow us time to reflect upon Christ's sacrifice for us. The Celebrant reminds us that Christ's sacrifice is our Passover. We respond with "Therefore let us keep the feast."

The prayer known as the Agnus Dei, Lamb of God, may be said or sung as a response to all that has just taken place in the liturgical act of giving thanks. The Prayer of Humble Access reminds us that we come to share in the communion of the Lord's Table only through Christ. The Celebrant then issues the invitation to come to the Lord's Table.

Communion in the Episcopal Church is open. That means that all believing people are welcome to share in the communion of the Lord's Table. This Prayer Book affirms that once we are baptized into the Body of Christ, we are part of the community of faith and therefore are be welcomed to share in the practices of the church. That is why in this parish we invite children to receive communion as soon as their parents deem it appropriate.

We come to the altar rail, kneel or stand. It is interesting to note that altar rails are a rather new addition to churches. The rail was installed to prevent animals from fouling the altar when they wandered into church buildings. Kneeling to receive communion has never appeared in the rubric for this service. Well into the eighteenth century bishops and priests moved out into the midst of the congregation to administer communion. Clergy and worship leaders receive communion first in both kinds. This is a practical concern, they are to determine that the bread and wine are okay to be distributed to the people. At the altar rail, one places one open hand on top of the other in the form of a cross. The priest will place a piece of bread on our hand. We may either place the bread in our mouth or hold it between the thumb and forefinger to dip the bread in the wine, known as intinction. The Eucharistic Minister will approach with the chalice. Guide the chalice to your lips or hold the bread so the minister can see that you intend to intinct. Remember the chalice is silver, guide it to your lips and take a sip. One may simply come to the altar for a blessing if they do not wish to receive communion. Simply cross your arms over your chest to indicate to the priest your intention to be blessed.

We come together as God's people to share the gifts God has provided for us. We join our prayers with the prayers of people all around the world, believing that Christ is present with us always as he promised he would be.

Celebrant continues with Sursum Corda all the way through communion.

Narrator: After communion we sing an Ablutions hymn while the vessels are cleaned and returned to the sacristy. The altar guild will clean and polish each vessel in preparation for the next use. Any bread or wine that remains after everyone has communed must be consumed, placed in the ambry near the side altar to be distributed to those unable to attend worship or poured into the ground. We join in a prayer of thanksgiving, receive God's blessing and are dismissed. The entire celebration is a blessing. Strengthened and refreshed we are sent into the world to proclaim the Gospel in word and deed. We have been made one with Christ and with each other by the sharing of communion. We are invited to take the love and peace we receive into the world in Christ's name.

Celebrant concludes with prayer or thanksgiving, blessing and dismissal.

