

**Instructed Eucharist**  
**St. James, Stratford October 30, 2011**

**Preparation**

As Christians of the Anglican tradition, how we worship – our liturgy – is very important to us. The word “liturgy” means “the work of the people”; it is not the property of the clergy or a select few church members. Rather, it is work which we, as the whole people of God, all share together. Now, our liturgy doesn’t begin with the opening strains of the first hymn. It begins with preparation.

Members of the congregation prepare at home: praying; readying their offering envelopes; putting out a food bank donation; doing some baking for Sunday fellowship; practicing scripture readings, or the prayers of the people; Church School teachers plan their lessons.

The church building needs to be made ready. Our caretaker makes sure that all is clean and in good order. The Chancel Guild come in on Saturday morning, to clean and polish brass and silver; to check candles and flowers; to change the hangings to the correct colour for the day; and making sure that the white linen is spotless and ironed. They set out the dishes for our Eucharistic meal around the altar, count wafers, and fill cruets with water and wine.

Hymns, anthems, and service music have been chosen with care to reflect the church season and the scripture readings appointed for the day. The music director and choir pray together; they rehearse the music; the organ prelude and postlude are practiced.

Our office administrator has prepared, collated and folded the Sunday bulletin; has sent off the readings and prayers of the people to the lectors and intercessors.

Wardens and sidespeople arrive early, opening doors, turning on lights and heat, setting out parking signs, and they are ready to

greet folk as they arrive for worship. Our Verger makes sure the hymn numbers are up, and is ready with clipboard in hand to take down names and information about new parishioners. The Servers arrive early, too. They get vested, confer with the clergy, light the candles, get ready for the procession and carry out a variety of tasks which change from week to week.

The clergy prepare. A sermon is written. Chanting is practiced. Time is spent in prayer, thinking and making decisions about the details for the service. Clergy try to make sure that the many different pieces of the liturgy will fit together, and that everybody is empowered to do what they need to do. They prepare vestments, liturgical clothing which reflects the church season, the day, and their role in the service. And we gather in prayer with the choir and servers.

We call this Celebration of Holy Eucharist a “sacrament”, that is “an outward, visible sign, of an inward and spiritual reality.” That reality, what God works in us and through Jesus Christ, is greater than we could ask or imagine. Because of this, and because all we do is offered to God’s glory, we try to do our best work, to prepare to the very best of our ability.

This is our liturgy; we are the people of God, and this is our work.

So now we begin.

### **Hymn, Greeting, Collect for Purity, Gloria, Collect of the Day, Children.....**

#### **Gathering of the Community**

We begin making a joyful noise, as we sing the first hymn. Servers, choir and clergy process in. The procession is not about getting from A to B (there are simpler ways to do that!), but rather is an announcement that something important is beginning to unfold. As the procession follows the cross. it is a sign that we all are called to follow in the way of the cross of Jesus Christ.

The priest and the people then exchange a greeting using the words of St. Paul, a greeting used by Christians since the very beginnings of the Church.

Our first prayer is the Collect for Purity. A “Collect” is a truly Anglican form of prayer. As its name suggests, this kind of prayer “collects” our thoughts, and focuses them in God’s direction. The Collect for Purity, which is the same each Sunday, asks God to put us all in the right frame of mind and heart. Thus prepared, we often sing the Gloria, an ancient song of praise. The Collect of the Day, which follows, changes with each Sunday and Holy day; its words often reflect the theme of the scripture readings for the day.

And we gather the children at the front.....

Now that our bodies, minds and hearts have been “gathered”, we move into.....

### **The Proclamation of the Word**

Our Sunday readings – Old Testament/Hebrew Scripture lesson, Psalm, New Testament lesson, Gospel, follow a 3-year cycle called the Lectionary. Using the Lectionary helps to ensure that we hear a goodly portion of the Bible read aloud over the 3 years. It also joins us with Anglicans around the world and Christians of several other denominations who read and hear the same scripture on the same day.

The Old Testament/Hebrew scripture lesson tells stories of our ancient ancestors in the faith forging a relationship with God; stories of people awaiting the coming of the Messiah, which Christians believe is Jesus. The psalms are hymns of ancient Israel. The original music has been lost, so now we use newer music to enliven ancient and eternal words. The New Testament lesson – usually excerpts from letters sent by St. Paul and others to various churches in the ancient Christian world – tells how the first Christian communities lived their lives in the light of what

Jesus did and taught. The Gospel recounts the stories and teachings of Jesus.

We give the Gospel a place of honour, as it records what Jesus said and did, the most important foundation of our faith. We honour the Gospel in many ways. We stand; we process the Gospel book so that it is read in the midst of the congregation; we begin and end the reading with special words of acclamation. The Deacon, as well as the congregation, may make the 3-fold sign of the cross, on forehead, lips and chest, as a symbolic way of saying we think of Christ, speak of Christ, and carry Christ in our hearts wherever we go.

When we hear the Gospel read in this way, it is as if we, like the crowds 2000 years ago are gathered around Jesus himself, to witness his actions and hear his words to us.

The final part of the proclamation of the word is the homily or sermon. This can take a number of different forms and go in a variety of directions, but its primary purpose is to further open up the scriptures of the day, with fresh learnings and insight, connected with the lived lives of the community in which it is preached.

### **First Reading, Psalm, Second Reading, Gradual, Gospel, [Homily]**

### **The Creed**

The word “creed” comes from the Latin “Credo”, meaning simply “I believe”. The Creed is our opportunity to respond together to the scripture readings and the sermon. It is an attempt to set out the fundamentals of Christian faith we hold in common. Each time we say the Creed together, we renew our shared faith, and renew our understanding of, and commitment to, that faith.

There are several different forms of the Creed; the two most commonly used are the Nicene and Apostles’ Creeds. The Apostles’ Creed, the older of the two, is a baptism creed from the very early church, a response to questions candidates were asked before they were baptized. The Nicene Creed evolved from the

church council of Nicaea in the year 325, which had met to work out some common understanding of Christian theology.

While some aspects of the Creed can seem perhaps out of date, we keep them because not only do they connect us with Christian history, they connect with a Christian history shared by ALL Christian denominations, and thus they remain a point of common connection between churches today.

### **Prayers of the People/Intercessions**

Each Sunday we pray for ourselves, one another, and the world. We can stand, kneel, or sit to pray. We close our eyes, in an attempt to clear our minds of distractions, and focus on God, and those for whom we have been asked to pray. Intercessory prayer is powerful; it supports those we know, and those we don't know. It reminds us that we are part of what St. Paul calls "the Body of Christ", and that in Christ we are connected with all people of God's creation; that the struggles of one affect us all. We also focus on God's priorities of justice, mercy and peace for all humanity, and we make sure to thank God for the many blessings we receive.

### **Confession & Absolution**

The last and very important thing we do before we exchange the Peace, and move into the Eucharist is to confess our sins. We may do this as a separate prayer, or, as today, a petition within the prayers of the people. We recognize that sin creates barriers of hurt and anger between ourselves and others, and between us and God. We also recognize that only God's forgiveness, won for us through Jesus' death on the cross has the power to remove this barrier and restore us. With the help of God's Holy Spirit we declare our intention to start over fresh and live as God wants us to live.

the priest (of Bishop) pronounces absolution, the "absolving prayer", declaring God's mercy and forgiveness. The priest makes the sign of the cross as a reminder of the forgiveness won through Christ. Many in the congregation also make the sign of the cross on themselves.

## **The Peace**

We have prepared, heard God's Word, renewed our faith, prayed for ourselves and others, confessed our sins to one another and to God. Sharing the Peace is an outward sign of reconciliation between ourselves, and ourselves and God. To share the Peace with one's sisters and brothers in the congregation can be a powerful moment of connection.....not to be done lightly!

## **The Creed, Confession & Absolution, the Peace**

### **The Offertory**

In Greece one regularly hears the word "eucharisto", meaning "thank you". This is why we call this celebration "the great thanksgiving". We begin our thank you celebration by setting the table, gathering onto it gifts of bread and wine; we collect and offer money offering, and our prayers. All these signs that we offer all of ourselves to God - our time, money, gifts, abilities - all of it comes together here, at the Table of the Lord.

### **The Great Thanksgiving**

At every Eucharist we recall Jesus' Last Supper with his disciples, following his command to "do this in memory of me". In the Anglican Church there many different Eucharistic prayers, but each follows a similar shape. We begin with a call and response - The Lord be with you.....this is called the "sursum corda", meaning "lift up you hearts".

The first part of the prayer recalls "salvation history", God the Creator, God acting through countless generations of the faithful. And then we gather with angels, and archangels and all the company of heaven" and sing an ancient song of praise, "Holy, Holy, Holy (Isaiah).....Blessed is the One (from Jesus' entry into Jerusalem)....."

The next part of the prayer focuses on Jesus, his life and ministry, with the high point coming when we hear Jesus' words, as recorded in the Gospels, from the last supper (also called "the

words of institution”) – “this is my body/blood given for you. Do this in memory of me.”

We then ask the Holy Spirit to come upon the bread and wine, and make them holy. Anglicans believe that this is not simply a memorial, but that the bread and wine are both, at the same time, bread and wine, and body and blood of Jesus. When the priest lifts the bread and wine, the words spoken gather it all together – “through Christ, with Christ and in Christ, in the unity of the Holy Spirit, all glory be to God almighty, world without end.” And we respond “So be it!” “AMEN!”

Every time we share the Eucharist, we are participating in something that Christians have done for 2000 years, and we recognize Jesus’ presence in this sacrament, the outward and visible sign of an inward and spiritual reality.

### **Lord’s Prayer & Breaking of the Bread**

We say the Lord’s prayer, the prayer Jesus gave to us; we break the bread, and we are welcomed to receive the bread and wine. This is God’s welcome, not ours, an invitation made possible through God’s grace alone; we have not earned it, through our actions or our understanding. And all are welcome to receive.

### **The Communion**

Celtic spirituality speaks of “thin places”, where the sacred and the holy are tangible; where the separation between heaven and earth, God and creation, almost disappears. Without a doubt, the giving and receiving of the body and blood of Christ is one of those “thin places”, a moment of forgiveness and healing, of being fed in the depths of our very souls.

### **The Great Thanksgiving, the Communion**

### **Conclusion**

We end our liturgy saying together the wonderful doxology – praise prayer – from Paul’s letter to the Ephesians.....”Glory to God....”. The priest (or Bishop) blesses the people, once again sealing the sign of the cross upon us.

The final liturgical act is the dismissal. Reconciled, renewed, refreshed, we are charged, by the Deacon, to move out into the community, into the world once more, to live out the Gospel in our day to day lives. God has made a difference in our lives; through us, God longs to make a difference in the lives of others.