

Anglican Liturgy

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In this brief discussion of Liturgy I will discuss the History/Origins of Liturgy, the Shape of the Liturgy and the Meaning of liturgy.

Origins /Sources of Liturgy

Then Moses called all the elders of Israel and said to them, 'Go, select lambs for your families, and slaughter the Passover lamb. Take a bunch of hyssop, dip it in the blood that is in the basin, and touch the lintel and the two doorposts with the blood in the basin. None of you shall go outside the door of your house until morning. For the Lord will pass through to strike down the Egyptians; when he sees the blood on the lintel and on the two doorposts, the Lord will pass over that door and will not allow the destroyer to enter your houses to strike you down. You shall observe this rite as a perpetual ordinance for you and your children.' (Exodus 12: 21-24) "In Antiquity, therefore, Passover was marked by the sacrifice of lambs the day before the multiple-day feast began, lambs which were then eaten in each household during a highly ritualized meal. Another important part of the Passover meal was unleavened bread. In fact, the only bread the Jewish people were allowed to eat during the festival was unleavened."
(http://www.yale.edu/adhoc/research_resources/liturgy/mass.html.)

'This day shall be a day of remembrance for you. You shall celebrate it as a festival to the Lord; throughout your generations you shall observe it as a perpetual ordinance. Seven days you shall eat unleavened bread; on the first day you shall remove leaven from your houses, for whoever eats leavened bread from the first day until the seventh day shall be cut off from Israel.' (Exodus 12: 14-15) "These two primary Passover rituals (the slaughtering of lambs and the eating of unleavened bread within the context of the Passover meals) became the principal means through which early Christians interpreted Jesus of Nazareth's death."
(http://www.yale.edu/adhoc/research_resources/liturgy/mass.html.)

"During the meal Jesus took some bread in his hands. He blessed the bread and broke it. Then he gave it to his disciples and said, 'Take this and eat it. This is my body.' Jesus picked up a cup of wine and gave thanks to God. He then gave it to his disciples and said, 'Take this and drink it. This is my blood, and with it God makes his agreement with you. It will be poured out, so that many people will have their sins forgiven. From now on I am not going to drink any wine, until I drink new wine with you in my Father's kingdom.'" (Matthew 26:26-28)

On the road to Emmaus we see a risen Christ talking with his disciples who did not recognize him. "Then Jesus asked the two disciples, 'Why can't you understand? How can you be so slow to believe all that the prophets said? Didn't you know that the Messiah would have to suffer before he was given his glory?' Jesus then explained everything written about himself in the Scriptures, beginning with the Law of Moses and the Books of the Prophets. When the two of them came near the village where they were going, Jesus seemed to be going farther. They begged him, 'Stay with us! It's already late, and the sun is going down.' So Jesus went into the house to stay with them. After Jesus sat down to eat, he took some bread. He blessed it and broke it. Then he gave it to them. At once they knew who he was, but he disappeared." (Luke 24:25-31). Here in these passages, we see a distinct service of the word joined to the Eucharist.

"For I received from the Lord what I also passed on to you: The Lord Jesus, on the night he was betrayed, took bread, and when he had given thanks, he broke it and said, 'This is my body, which is for you; do this in remembrance of me.' In the same way, after supper he took the cup, saying, 'This cup is the new covenant in my blood; do this, whenever you drink it, in remembrance of me.' For whenever you eat this bread and drink this cup, you proclaim the Lord's death until he comes." (I Corinthians 11:23-26).

"So those who received his word were baptized, and there were added that day about three thousand souls. And they devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers. And all who believed were together and had all things in common. And they were selling their possessions and belongings and distributing the proceeds to all, as any had need. And day by day, attending the temple together and breaking bread in their homes" (Acts Chapter 2:41-42, 44-46).

"There is an additional non canonical source for the early church liturgy. And that is a tradition that comes from a non-canonical writing, the **Didache** or the teaching of the twelve apostles. It's the oldest Christian church manual that we possess, and it is composed some time at the beginning of the second century, but certainly composed on the basis of materials that are much, much older and go back probably [to] the first half of the first century. And this church manual also includes a tradition about the Eucharist, which must be very old. And it's very, very interesting. The Didache is a writing that was only discovered at the end of the last century.

It was known that it existed, because later church orders built on it. But the original document itself was only discovered and published about 100 years ago. Now, in the Didache we have Eucharistic prayers which express the consciousness of the congregation that formed them. In both traditions, the one of I Corinthians and the one of the Didache, the eschatological [end times] orientation is predominant. That is, both [are] oriented towards the meal and the kingdom of God in the future. I think there can be little doubt that this eschatological outlook at the celebration of the meal comes from Jesus himself. It developed in two different ways: one in the tradition that we have in Paul, the other in the Didache.”

(<http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/pages/frontline/shows/religion/symposium/story.html>.)

With the Scripture passages quoted, we get a sense of the historical origins and characteristics employed in the development of Liturgy by the Churches. “By the time Christians came to employ the term ‘Liturgy’ for their system of worship, it was already rich in sacred and secular meanings. For Christians, sacred liturgy was the public service owed to God and rendered by the Church on behalf of itself and of the world. At root this service was twofold. It consisted of thanksgiving and supplication: thanksgiving for a world created and redeemed through the Messiah and intercession through the same Messiah on behalf of a world not yet fully redeemed.”

(http://www.yale.edu/adhoc/research_resources/liturgy/intro.html.) “Romans did not celebrate the Eucharist in exactly the same way as Constantinopolitans or Toledans. Important cities, however, did influence the liturgical development of lesser cities and especially the cities in their regions. Even the bishops of great cities such as Rome borrowed from the liturgies of other centers such as Jerusalem or Constantinople. Eventually, large liturgical families called **rites** developed. In the West some of the most important rites were the **Roman**, the **Ambrosian** (that from the city of Milan), and the **Gallican**.” [Gaul]

(http://www.yale.edu/adhoc/research_resources/liturgy/intro.html.)

The Liturgy of the Anglican Church began primarily as a version of the Roman Rite called the **Sarum Rite** but also contains elements of the Tridentine and Ambrosian and other Rites. In our Book of Common Prayer (1979) there are two Liturgical rites. “The Rite 1 liturgies reflect the language and piety of the Elizabethan era and the first BCP, although the structure of these liturgies also reflects the influence of modern liturgical scholarship.

The Rite 2 liturgies reflect more fully the influence of the liturgical movement and contemporary theology.”

(http://www.episcopalchurch.org/19625_15236_ENG_HTM.html.)

Shape of the Liturgy

The Liturgy is in two parts. Liturgy means the work of the people. The primary work of the people (church) is **Worship**. Worship is what makes the church the church.

Part One: The Liturgy of the Word

“The Liturgy of the word is considered to have always been a part of the Eucharist from the beginning of Christian worship” (Jones, etc. The study of Liturgy, 1992 p.43). “Christian faith regards Christ as the central content of Scripture, and every message about the act of God in Christ is derived from and determined by the message of Scripture, so that setting aside the written word of God would be the same as setting aside Christ and the Word incarnate in him.” (Aulen, The faith of the Christian Church, p.364)

In the liturgy of the word Christians come together to thank God for God’s gifts. Listening to God’s word (the Bible) they grow in faith more conformed to the mind of Christ. Liturgy celebrates the wonders of creation and gives thanks for the reality of redemption. The liturgy is a celebration not of what God has said, but of God today speaking to our hearts and souls.

A). **The First Reading: -The Hebrew Scriptures:** The first reading is mostly chosen from the Old Testament and during some seasons the Book of Acts might be read. This reading usually harmonizes with the Gospel reading (see below). This reveals the continuity between Israel and Jesus who comes not to replace but to fulfill Israel.

B). **The Responsorial Psalm:** The Psalm reflects themes in the readings. The Psalm consists of an antiphon. This is a vehicle of prayer and praise - an atmosphere of prayer within which the readings occur.

C). **The Second Reading - The Christian Scriptures:** This reading is also referred to as the Epistle, is usually from one of the letters in the New Testament which may also include the Book of Acts or the Book of

Revelations. While the letters address particular situations in the early Church, their message transcends the centuries to motivate contemporary Christians and deepen our appreciation of the mystery of Christ.

D). **The Gospel - Alleluia:** “Alleluia” is a Latin echo of the Hebrew acclamation “Praise God!” and is a key word in Christian worship. Here it heralds the Gospel. In a solemn celebration the church deacon goes to the altar where the Gospel is enthroned. He lifts the book and, accompanied by servants (altar-boys) with candles and on some occasions incense (symbols of Christ’s light), processes with the Gospels held high while choir and community acclaim the good news with “Alleluia,” alternating with verses appropriate to today’s Gospel. Christians acclaim the most wonderful deed of God among humankind, Jesus Christ, here made visible in the book containing His words and message to us all.

E). **The Gospel Reading:** The Gospel is the climax of the liturgy of the word. Our faith teaches that in proclaiming the Gospel, Christ is truly present to the community. For this reason the community stands to witness to Christ’s resurrection which allows him to be present to his people. The **Gospel reading** in the service of the word is equal to the **Eucharistic Prayer** (Great Thanksgiving) in the service of the Eucharist. “The reading of the Gospel and the book itself symbolize the presence of Christ in the Liturgy of the word just as the Eucharistic prayer and the Eucharistic elements symbolize His presence in the liturgy of the table” (Hatchett, Commentary on the American Prayer Book, 1995, p.330-31). Hearing the Gospel proclaimed also reminds and identifies us with the first community which heard these words for the mouth of Jesus. On the conclusion of the reading the Deacon proclaims, “This is the Gospel of the Lord.” He means not the book, but the Gospel of Jesus Christ, the “Good News” itself. The community affirms in faith by responding, “Praise to you, Lord Jesus Christ”.

F). **The Homily (or mini-sermon):** Christians believe that “faith comes through preaching.”(Romans 3:13-15). This idea is rooted in Jewish belief that the creative power of God’s word transforms human life. “Preaching then is sacramental, in that through proclamation of the word God not only

discloses Himself, but also effects a change in the recipient. The appropriate responses to God's revelation in word and sacrament are prayer, praise and dedication." (Jones etc. P.42) In the reformed traditions, the sermon is the primary focus of the liturgy. In the Roman tradition, the Homily may be absent with the Eucharist the primary focus of the liturgy.

G).The profession of Faith: (the Creed): The Creed is a written profession summarizing the community's search for an ever deepening understanding of Jesus and His message. The Nicene-Constantinople Creed is most often used, although the Apostles' Creed may be used at some liturgies.

H). General Intercessions (Prayers of the People conducted by the deacon or a lay person): The people petition God for the needs of the Church, society, the parish, people in need, the sick and suffering, and those who have died. They direct our faith which has been deepened through prayer and listening to God's word to specific situations today. These prayers conclude the Liturgy of the Word.

I). Confession of Sin: A confession of Sin on the part of the whole congregation was new to the liturgies of the Reformation period. The rubric designates that a confession of sin is to be said here if it has not been said earlier. The words of the General Confession date from 1548.

J). The Absolution: This dates to the Prayer Book of 1549 and is pronounced by the Bishop or Priest.

K). The Peace: The first unambiguous references to the Peace are in the Baptismal Liturgies because the Peace could not be exchanged with the uninitiated. The reformed liturgies did not include the exchange of the Peace.

Part Two: The Liturgy of the Eucharist.

While the liturgy of the word focused upon the table of the Lord's word-the lectern, the Eucharistic liturgy centers upon the altar-both a place of sacrifice, as the mercy seat from the Holy of Holies as well as the table from which as Christians we are fed. The themes of **sacrifice, Christ as High Priest** (He is not just the sacrifice, He is the High Priest of the sacrifice) **and meal dominate.**

A). The preparation of the Alter and the Gifts- The gifts of bread and wine are placed on the Alter. The people then join in the giving their monetary offerings in support of their community and it are various ministries. This collection is a real expression of support for your local community church.

Taking is the first of the Eucharistic actions. While the Western Church in the past emphasized the bread and wine which are transformed, originally the Hebrew context stressed the actions themselves. Thus the Eucharist is often referred to in Scripture not in terms of the bread and wine but as actions of **taking, blessing, breaking and sharing**. The early Church commonly referred to the Eucharist as the “breaking of bread.” The Deacon prepares the gifts of bread and wine for the Celebrant at the altar. The Deacon then adds water to the wine - a tradition from the 1st Church who considered it symbolic of the union of Christ’s humanity and divinity, or of Christ with his Church. The celebrant then washes his hands as did the Jewish leaders before the ritual meal. This action has also taken on symbolic significance.

B) Eucharistic Prayer: (There are two forms for the Eucharistic Prayer in Rite I and four forms of the Eucharistic prayer in Rite II) Now at the very heart of the Eucharist, this prayer in some aspect antedates Christianity itself. Its model is derived from the Jewish Berakah or blessing prayer. Berakah prayer generally praises and blesses God for all the wonderful gifts of creation. The celebrant gives thanks to God in imagery appropriate to the day or season and the “Holy, Holy, Holy” is sung or recited by the community. Now in a longer prayer of thanksgiving, the priest on behalf of all gives thanks to God for Christ. He asks the Father to send the Holy Spirit upon the gifts of bread and wine that they may become to us also Christ’s body and blood. This invocation is known as the **epiclesis**. The institution narrative recalls the Last Supper which in essence, goes back to Jesus himself. Even Paul quotes these words as tradition. The institution narrative leads the people to acclaim their faith in one of four different acclamations. The people are not simple observers but active participants in the mystery being celebrated. Remembrance of the saving acts of Jesus follows. This section is known as the **anamnesis**. Remembrance is a much stronger

action in Jesus' day then in our culture. To remember something meant to enter into it and bring its power into the present. Thus in remembering, Jesus' sacrifice becomes present and can be entered into just as the first disciples did. The Church in celebrating the Eucharist is fulfilling Jesus' command to keep His memorial. It does this by recalling especially his passion, resurrection and ascension.

In this memorial, the Church joins in Christ's self-offering to the Father in the Holy Spirit. It calls the faithful not only to offer the spotless victim but also to learn to offer themselves. In doing so they are drawn into ever more perfect union, through Christ the Mediator, with the Father and with each other, so that at last God may be all in all. The priest then again invokes the Holy Spirit to bless the Church and to unite all Christians and again to **bless** the gifts.

The intercessions make it clear that the **Eucharist is celebrated in communion with the entire Church in heaven and on earth**. The offering is made for the Church in all its members, living and dead, who are called to share in salvation. We remember the saints as well as our brothers and sisters who have died and our friends in need. The great prayer concludes with a doxology. The people confirm this entire prayer with a final "Amen."

C). Communion Rite: Communion expresses unity in the body of Christ. Through communion Christians are united with God in Christ and through Christ with one another in unity.

The Lord's Prayer opens this rite in the words and according to the model of Jesus. After the prayer the priest's short prayer continues its spirit and followed up with another doxology.

The Sign of Peace goes back to the earliest Christians and is a result of God's reconciliation which begins among Christians and then flows into the world at large.

The **Breaking** of the Bread is the third great action of the Eucharist. To the early Christians, sharing in one loaf was a symbol of unity, solidarity and family; sliced bread, crackers or individual hosts (special wafers) lose this significance. During this action the people sing a litany acknowledging Jesus

as the Lamb of God pointed to by John the Baptist and that the bread we share is indeed that same Christ.

Now the priest holds up the host and cup, **inviting (share)** the community to come forward and receive. The community responds with the words of the Roman centurion to Jesus (Matthew 8:8). Then the journey toward the altar to receive Communion; this procession reflects the journey we all have towards God. And made with friends in the community it is one more sign of unity flowing from the Eucharist. A Psalm is also generally sung by the choir and community as this journey forward continues. After receiving Communion all return to their seats and spend the time in prayer. The priest then draws the prayers together in the Prayer after Communion.

D). Concluding Rites: These rites now focus upon the sending forth of the community. No sacrament exists as an end in itself. Christians are transformed and nourished in the sacraments to in turn become sacraments to the world. The priest gives a final blessing. As at the beginning all trace the sign of the cross. The dismissal by the Deacon sends us forth to in turn become the bread of the world. The word "Mass" comes from the ancient Latin dismissal, "Ite, missa est." (Go, it is sent).

Note: The description of the form of Liturgy was in part constructed from Hatchett's Commentary on the American Prayer Book and from the following website: (<http://www.ourcatholicfaith.org/mass/word.html>.)

Meaning of Liturgy

Liturgy is the work of Christ the Priest and of His Body which is the church. "It is the feast of the resurrection" (Joseph Ratzinger, The Feast of Faith, 1986, p. 65). Liturgy is anamnesis because we remember/participate in Christ's suffering and death, His resurrection and ascension and we look to his coming again (Eschatology). "This is a participation in the once for all sacrifice of Jesus who is 'the Lamb slain from the foundation of the world.' It neither is a 'resacrificing' nor is it only representational. It is a mystical participation in the once for all sacrifice." (*Fr. Carlos Raines, personal communication*). Liturgy is reunion and union. In liturgy we are made one with our God and He is made one with us. We are participating in God's Kingdom celebrating with the entire church, past, present and future. We are edified, and "in-formed". In the self transcendent experience of the Liturgy we find our own true identity. "In finding my own identity by being identified with Christ, I am made one with Him; my true self is restored to me, I

know that I am accepted, and this enables me to give myself back to him.” , p.29). I would add that this also allows me to give my true self to others also. Amen