

ST. PETER'S ANGLICAN CHURCH

INSTRUCTED EUCHARIST

I. How Did the Early Church Celebrate the Eucharist?: *The First Apology of Justin Martyr*

1. 155 AD: Justin writes his *First Apology* addressed to the emperor Antonius Pius defending Christian beliefs and practices. About 10 years later he is martyred.

2. Justin provides a description of what worship looked like in his church in Rome and the details are important:

- a. Christian worship takes place on Sunday because this is the day on which Christ was raised from the dead
- b. the “memoirs of the apostles” and the “writings of the prophets” are read “as long as time permits” (Gospels and Old Testament).
- c. a sermon follows
- d. Then follow “heartily prayers in common for ourselves...and for all others in every place”
- e. The prayers are followed by the exchange of a kiss (the Peace)
- f. “There is then brought to the president of the brethren bread and a cup of wine mixed with water; and he taking them, gives praise and glory to the Father of the universe, through the name of the Son and of the Holy Ghost, and offers thanks at considerable length for our being accounted worthy to receive these things at His hands.”
- g. Justin tells us that this is called the Eucharist and that only the baptized are allowed to receive it. The reason is this: “For not as common bread; but in like manner as Jesus Christ our Savior, having been made flesh by the Word of God, had both flesh and blood for our salvation, so likewise we have been taught that the food which is blessed by the prayer of His word...is the flesh and blood of that Jesus who was made flesh.”

3. Note the structure of worship: the Liturgy of the Word (Scripture, prayers, peace) followed by the Liturgy of the Table (extended eucharistic prayer in a trinitarian shape culminating in the people receiving Body and Blood of Christ). The essential structure of Christian worship is in place.

4. For Justin and the early Christians, the Eucharist was not simply a rite or even a sacrament; it defined the Church because it was the way in which the Lord was present to his people across history; in the Eucharist the Word made flesh continued to dwell with his people.

5. The Eucharist was essential to early Christian experience. In his *Lectures on the Christian Sacraments* (ca. 348) St. Cyril of Jerusalem told a group of catechumens “for in the figure of Bread is given to you His Body, and in the figure of Wine His Blood; that you by partaking of the Body and the Blood of Christ might be made of the same body and the same blood with Him. For thus we come to bear Christ in us, because His Body and Blood are diffused through our members.”

II. The Eucharist in the New Testament: 5 Themes

1. What is the proper context in which to interpret the Eucharist? Matthew 26:19 makes it clear that Jesus intended to celebrate the Passover with his disciples. In 1 Corinthians 5:7 Paul refers to Christ as the Passover lamb that has been sacrificed. Jesus' actions in the Upper Room are best understood in the context of the Passover.

2. There is an important parallel between the Passover (Exodus 12:1-13:10; Deuteronomy 6:20-25) and the Eucharist. The Passover interprets the central event of the Old Testament (the Exodus) while the Eucharist interprets the central event of the New Testament (Jesus' death and resurrection). Both Passover and Eucharist are instituted *before* the event they interpret occurs and they serve to connect subsequent generations to the event they interpret.

3. To interpret the events of the Upper Room in the light of the Passover is to remember that Jesus' death and resurrection have their meaning only within the matrix of God's relationship with Israel. In the events of the Upper Room, Jesus claims that the entire history of Israel comes to its culmination in him. The culmination of God's redemptive purposes is what creates the Church and this is why the Eucharist was from the beginning the center of Christian worship; the Eucharist is the Passover of the New Covenant.

4. In the New Testament, the Eucharist does not simply have one meaning but rather, several dimensions of meaning. It is important to recognize that the Church celebrated the Eucharist before the New Testament writings existed so we can not expect them to provide a comprehensive explanation of the Eucharist. Let's explore five of these dimensions briefly:

5. **Thanksgiving:** According to Luke 22:17-19 (cf. Matthew 26:27; Mark 14:23) Jesus, in typically Jewish fashion, offered thanks over the cup and the bread in the Upper Room. The name of the sacrament, Eucharist, comes from the Greek verb used here which simply means "thanksgiving". The thanksgiving here would have involved thanks offered for God's calling of Israel, God's faithfulness to Israel and God's goodness manifested in creation. To get a sense of what this thanksgiving was like, read Psalms 105 and 106. The Eucharist became the Church's central act of thanksgiving. To get a sense of what this means in a Christian context, read Ephesians 1:3-14.

6. **Memorial (*Anamnesis*):** In Luke 22:19 and I Corinthians 11:24-25 Jesus actions in the Upper Room are accompanied by the instruction to "do this in remembrance of me". The Greek verb which Jesus uses here is often translated into English as "do in remembrance of me" but this is inadequate. The verb does not mean "to recall mentally" or "to commemorate" but something far stronger. Jesus is not saying that the Eucharist is to be celebrated as a way of recalling him, as if he were simply absent. Rather, he is saying that each time the Church celebrates the Eucharist the events of the Upper Room will become *contemporary* to those engaged in its celebration. This is to say that in the Eucharist the sacrificial death of Jesus and its benefits are made present to who share in the bread and cup.

7. **Communion (*Koinonia*):** In 1 Corinthians 10:14-22 the sharing in the bread and wine is described as an entering into communion (*koinonia*) with the risen Christ: "The cup of blessing that we bless, is it not a *koinonia* in the blood of Christ? The bread which we break, is it not a *koinonia* in the body of Christ?" In the Eucharist, the Church enters into visible communion with her risen Lord who is manifested in the bread and wine *as being present*. Because Christ is risen, he can be encountered as a figure in the present.

8. Covenant sacrifice: In the Old Testament covenants are sealed with a sacrifice (cf. Genesis 12:7-20; Genesis 13:3-10; Exodus 24). Hebrews 9:18-22 notes that the covenant made on Mt. Sinai was sealed in blood and goes on to note in 9:23-28 that Christ has sealed the new covenant in his own blood. In Matthew 26:28, using the language of Exodus 24:28, Jesus says that “this is my blood of the covenant” (cf. Mark 14:24; Luke 22:20). This is a key element in the interpretation of Jesus’ death. His death institutes a new covenant or, more accurately, he *is the new covenant*.

9. Anticipation of Christ’s return: In Luke 22 and 1 Corinthians 11 we find an emphasis on the Eucharist anticipating the future. In Luke 22:16 Jesus says that he will not eat the Passover again until “it is fulfilled in the kingdom of God”. In 1 Corinthians 11:26 Paul reminds the Corinthians that “as often as you eat this bread and drink the cup, you proclaim the Lord’s death until he comes.” The Eucharist does not simply look backward; it also looks forward to Christ’s return. The idea here is that Christ’s return is such a certainty that it can be celebrated *now*.

III. The Eucharistic Liturgy in Outline (Book of Common Prayer, Holy Eucharist, Rite II)

1. An important fact: the word “liturgy” comes from a Greek meaning “the work of the people”. This means that the liturgy is not something we watch as spectators but something in which we participate and offer to God as his people. Liturgy demands an investment of heart and mind and this is why it requires preparation beforehand.

2. While the liturgy may seem complicated, it is important to remember that it has a simple architecture. It is built around two things, the reading of Scripture and gathering at the altar. In both the reading of Scripture and in gathering at the altar we encounter the risen Christ and through both we are formed into his people. This one action is at the center of all liturgical actions.

3. The Liturgy of the Word:

Salutation (BCP, p. 355): The liturgy opens with a salutation which identifies the purpose of our being gathered. The most commonly used salutation is drawn from the Orthodox Church: “Blessed be God: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. And blessed be his kingdom, now and for ever.” There are separate salutations for the seasons of Easter and Lent.

Collect for Purity (BCP, p. 355): A collect is a brief, focused prayer said by the celebrant on behalf of all those present. The collect is offered to God as a prayer and is not addressed to the congregation. It reflects the fact that Christian worship is essentially trinitarian. In this collect we are asking for God to enable us to worship him truly through Jesus Christ and in the power of the Holy Spirit.

Act of Praise (BCP, p. 356): God, not the congregation, is the focus of worship. The Act of Praise can be sung or said. The liturgy is the means by which we join together in the praise of God.

Collect of the Day (BCP, p. 357): This collect is the “theme prayer” of the day and is offered by the celebrant on behalf of all present. There is a different collect appointed for each Sunday of the year (BCP, pp. 211-261) as well as for feast days and other occasions. The collects are an important way in which the theology of the BCP is expressed. Note, for example, the collect for the First Sunday of Advent on p. 211.

The Lessons: The BCP appoints a reading from the Old Testament, Psalms, the Epistles and the Gospels for each Sunday over a three year cycle (see pp. 889-921). The reading of

Scripture in a liturgical context presupposes two things. First, that the Old and New Testaments constitute a fundamental unity so that the Church reads both as *Christian* scripture. Second, God speaks to us through Scripture giving Scripture a *sacramental* quality. We stand to hear the Gospel read because we believe that the Lord directly addresses us through these four witnesses. Scripture is not primarily a book; it is the source from which the Church draws continual nourishment.

The Sermon: Preaching based on readings from Scripture is one of the practices the Church inherited from the synagogue (cf. Luke 4:16-30). The sermon should address us not as isolated individuals each of whom has his or her own “religion” but as God’s covenant people who encounter God in both the Word of Scripture and the Sacrament of the altar. The dual focus of the liturgy on Word and Sacrament makes it clear that all Scripture finds its fulfillment in Christ.

The Creed (BCP, p. 358): Nicene Creed is said in response to the reading and the proclaiming of God’s Word. This creed is the fullest statement of faith produced by the early Church apart from the liturgy itself, having been the work of the Council of Nicea (325) and the Council of Constantinople (381). The Creed is more than a list of beliefs but expresses the “rule of faith” by which the Church read Scripture. The Creed has a trinitarian structure and is fundamentally an affirmation of the Triune God. In this context we should also understand the Creed to have a doxological function.

Prayers of the People (BCP, p. 359): Set prayers were part of the synagogue liturgy and the Church took over this practice. The offering of intercessory prayers within the context of the liturgy is quite ancient and quickly found its way into the Church (cf. 1 Timothy 2:1-3). Praying for the world, the Church and for those in need is part of the vocation of Christians as a priestly people (cf. 1 Peter 2:9-10). The prayers of the people (BCP, pp. 383-393) provide a model for individual prayer. Once again, we see that the liturgy is essentially about prayer.

The Collect at the Prayers: The celebrant concludes the prayers by offering a collect which “collects” the intercessions which have been offered (see, pp. 394-395).

Confession of Sin (BCP, pp. 359-360): As Psalm 51 indicates, the discipline of confession goes all the way back to the Old Testament. At the beginning, the Church is marked by a public act of repentance and the reception of baptism for the forgiveness of sin (cf. Acts 2:37-38). The confession of sin is one of the disciplines of the Christian life. This confession is made in the context of the Eucharist which we know mediates to us the atoning work of Christ.

The Absolution (BCP, p. 360): In John 20:22-23 the apostles are given the authority to forgive sins by the risen Christ. In receiving this authority they are in continuity with the priesthood of the old covenant. In pronouncing the absolution, the priest pronounces the forgiveness of Christ. Thus we come to the altar as a forgiven and reconciled people. The purpose of the liturgy of the new covenant is continuous with the purpose of the liturgy of the old covenant: both exist to sanctify God’s people (cf. Leviticus 16).

The Peace (BCP, p. 360): This practice grew directly out of the admonition to “greet all the brothers with a holy kiss” (1 Thessalonians 5:26; cf. Romans 16:16). This is not an exchange of greetings but a sharing of the peace of Christ with one another.

4. One way to understand the Liturgy of the Word is to see it as offering those things which are necessary to encounter Christ (first in his Body and Blood and then face to face): the praise of God, the hearing of God’s Word, the confession of sin and the entering into restored relationships with other people. These are all essential elements of life in Christ.

5. The Liturgy of the Eucharist: It is important to remember that the canon of the Eucharist is an extended *prayer* offered by the celebrant on behalf of those sharing in the liturgy. It is not a speech directed to the congregation. As has been noted, the Eucharist derives its name from the fact that in the Upper Room Jesus gave thanks over the bread and wine. In the most ancient forms of this prayer, this prayer is a prayer of thanksgiving to God. In a third century liturgy called *The Apostolic Tradition*, the prayer begins like this: “We give thanks to you God, through your beloved child Jesus Christ, whom, in the last times, you sent to us as savior and redeemer and angel of your will, who is your inseparable Word through whom you made all things and who was well pleasing to you. You sent him from heaven into the womb of a virgin, and he was conceived and made flesh in the womb and shown to be your Son, born of the Holy Spirit and the virgin...”

The Offertory: During this time two things happen. First, the altar is prepared for the celebration of the Eucharist. The early Church regarded the Eucharist as having been anticipated by the sacrifice of Melchizedek who offered a sacrifice of bread and wine (Genesis 14:18). Hebrews regards Melchizedek as an anticipation of Christ (cf. Hebrews 7:15-22). In preparing the altar, water is mixed with the wine after John 19:31-37 where water and blood flow from Jesus’ pierced side. Second, the offerings of the people are collected. These are presented with the oblations, the additional bread and wine brought to the altar.

Sursum Corda: The Eucharistic Prayer begins with a dialogue between celebrant and people. This dialogue makes clear the central intent of the whole prayer. The celebrant instructs the people to “Lift up your hearts” and “Let us give thanks to the Lord our God”. This dialogue makes it clear that liturgy is “the work of the people”.

The Sanctus: We are invited to join our voices with the worship that continually take place in heaven. The invitation to join our voices “with Angels and Archangels and with all the company of heaven” recalls Revelation 5:11-14 and the invitation of Psalm 150:6. The Sanctus itself (“Holy, holy, holy, God of power and might...” is drawn from Isaiah 6:3 and from Matthew 21:9 (which itself cites Psalm 118:25-26). Between the *Sursum Corda* and the Sanctus there is inserted a **Proper Preface** appropriate to the season or the day (BCP, pp. 377-382).

The Anaphora: This is the extended prayer of thanksgiving offered to God in thanksgiving for God’s great acts of redemption culminating in Christ’s death and resurrection. In this way the liturgy offers an interpretation of the whole of Scripture, bringing into focus the point of the whole drama.

- **The Anamnesis:** This recalls the events of the Upper Room as the place where the whole drama of Israel’s history came to its culmination. Recalling Jesus words in Luke 22:19 and 1 Corinthians 11:24, the liturgy makes clear that in it the events of the Upper Room are brought forward for us to share in. We are not simply remembering the Upper Room but sharing in it.
- **The Memorial Acclamation:** This varies but is a proclamation of the “mystery of faith” (cf. Ephesians 3:4): “We remember his death; We proclaim his resurrection; We await his coming in glory” (BCP, p. 368).
- **Epiclesis:** The invocation of the Holy Spirit to sanctify the gifts of bread and wine. The Eucharist is an action of the Trinity. God the

Father renders his Son Jesus Christ present through the power of the Holy Spirit.

- **Final Doxology:** “By him, and with him, and in him, in the unity of the Holy Spirit...” This doxology is derived from Romans 11:36. It is possible to be overly concerned with the status of the bread and wine and to forget that the Church celebrates the Eucharist “by, with and in” Christ.
- **The Lord’s Prayer:** This prayer is especially appropriate in the context of the Eucharist for the prayer and the Eucharist are focused on the same thing: the coming of God’s kingdom.
- **The Fraction:** At this point the consecrated bread is broken. In this action the Eucharist as Christ’s interpretation of his death and the Cross as the event of Jesus’ death are joined together. In the Eucharist Upper Room and Cross are fused together and the Church is present at this single redemptive event. The theology of the Fraction is derived from 1 Corinthians 11:26 but the acclamation is taken from 1 Corinthians 5:7: “Christ, our Passover Lamb, has been sacrificed. Let us therefore celebrate the festival...”

Postcommunion Prayer (BCP, pp. 365-366): This prayer makes the transition from communion to dismissal. The prayer offers thanks for what has been received and asks that the sacrament bear fruit in those who have received it. It makes it clear that the reception of the Eucharist is not an end in itself but that the purpose of the sacrament is to deepen our communion with Christ.

The Dismissal (BCP, p. 366): While the Eucharist has concluded, our worship has not.

IV. Is The Eucharist “Catholic” or “High Church”?: On Not Asking the Wrong Questions

1. We often fail to understand the Eucharist because we ask the wrong questions about it. Two of the most prominent wrong questions involve asking whether the Eucharist is a “Catholic” thing or whether it is a “high church” thing. Some perspective helps: For most of the history of the Church the Eucharist was simply the form that Christian worship took; the idea that it might belong to a certain section of the Church or the idea that it might be as badge of some form of churchmanship was completely foreign.

2. In his *Catechism of the Church of Geneva* (1545), John Calvin supplies this answer to the question “Have we in the Supper a mere symbol of those benefits you mention, or is their reality exhibited to us there?”: “Since our Lord Jesus Christ is the truth itself, there can be no doubt but that the promises which he there gives us, he at the same time also implements, adding the reality to the symbol. Therefore I do not doubt but that, as testified by words and signs, he thus also makes us partakers of his substance, by which we are joined in one life with him.”

3. In his *Small Catechism* (1529), Martin Luther provides this answer to the question of the benefit of the Eucharist: “We are told in the words ‘for you’ and ‘for the forgiveness of sin’. By these words the forgiveness of sins, life and salvation are given to us in the sacrament, for where there is forgiveness of sins, there is also life and salvation.”

4. *The Roman Catechism* (1566) or *Catechism of the Council of Trent* offers this statement about the benefits of the Eucharist: “For the Holy Eucharist is truly and necessarily to be called the fountain of all graces, containing, as it does, after an admirable manner, the fountain itself of celestial gifts and graces, and the author of all the Sacraments, Christ our Lord, from whom, as from its source, is derived whatever of goodness and perfection the other Sacraments possess...to comprise all the advantages and blessings of this Sacrament in one word, it must be taught that the Holy Eucharist is most efficacious towards the attainment of eternal glory.”