

AN INSTRUCTED EUCHARIST

- † *The congregation is gathered and seated.*
- † *The reader comes forward and reads the following:*

At the heart of Christianity is the **Eucharist**, or Holy Communion. “Eucharist” comes from the Greek, and means “thanksgiving.” We give thanks to God for the gift of his Son Jesus, and for his healing presence in the breaking of bread and in the drinking of wine, as it was done by Jesus with his friends on the night before he died. Christians have celebrated the Eucharist for nearly two millennia following the death and resurrection of Jesus. As the body of Christ, we gather to celebrate the Eucharist, which is the “principal act of Christian worship on the Lord’s Day” (*The Book of Common Prayer*, page 13).

We Episcopalians are a **liturgical** church. The word “liturgy” is translated from two Greek words and means “work of the people.” We are the Church, the Body of Christ. We have come together to “make Eucharist.” This morning, as we celebrate together, we will take time to give short explanations about the many parts of the service. Except for some pauses for these explanations, our participation in the Eucharist will remain the same.

The **priest** ordinarily is the Celebrant, or presiding officer, for the entirety of the Eucharist. Even so, the priest is part of the congregation over which he or she presides. However, the **bishop**, when present, serves as celebrant. The **deacon** has distinct functions: she or he reads the Gospel, leads us in confession, prepares the table for the feast, assists in distributing the bread and wine, and dismisses us at the end of the service. The celebration of the Eucharist begins with the **Gathering of God’s People**. We gather to worship God. The word “worship” comes from middle English “worth-ship,” whereby we give worth and honor to God. Also, we gather in the Lord’s name because Jesus promises that “when two or three are gathered together in my name, I will be in the midst of them” (Matthew 18:20). Thus the *entirety* of the service is made holy by (1) *our gathering* (2) *to worship* (3) *in the Lord’s name*, rather than its being made holy by the actions and words of the celebrant.

We have been invited by our Lord Jesus to share in his feast! As the parish family, and with our friends and loved ones, we gather around the Lord’s Table. “Come, come, Lord Jesus and stand in the midst of us, as you stood in the midst of your disciples.”

The service begins with the **entrance**, or **procession**, of acolytes, choir, lay Eucharistic ministers, deacon, and priest. The purpose of the procession is to bring the Gospel into the midst of the people; thus our attention is directed to the “Book of Gospels” rather than to the participants. The entrance can be simple or more elaborate, including the singing of a hymn. Please stand and join in singing **Hymn 439**, *Wondrous Love*.

- † *The people sing **Hymn 439**.*
- † *The Gospel is brought into the midst of the people, accompanied by acolytes, choir, and the ministers.*

- † *The people may sit.*
- † *The reader continues:*

For this **Instructed Eucharist**, we will be using *The Book of Common Prayer*, hereafter referred to as *The Prayer Book*. The service today begins on page 355. Please turn to this page.

Because of its atmosphere of joy and thanksgiving, a Rite II Eucharist is appropriate for most of the seasons of the Church Year. In the penitential seasons of Advent and Lent, however, we use Rite I. Except for today, a Rite I Holy Eucharist is appropriate for the penitential seasons of Advent and Lent.

The first part of the Eucharist is the **LITURGY OF THE WORD**, referred to in *The Prayer Book* as **The Word of God**. It is conducted outside of the sanctuary (where the Lord's Table, or Altar, sits). This is deliberate, so as to highlight God's Word proclaimed to us. We believe Christ comes to us in a special way as we hear the words of the Bible, listen to the Good News of Jesus Christ proclaimed in sermon, and in prayer. The **Opening Acclamation** reminds us of the greatness of the triune God: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Then follows the **Collect for Purity**, which acknowledges that we need God's help to direct our thoughts and hearts, both in worship and in our lives.

- † *The people may stand.*
- † *Celebrant says the Opening Acclamation and Collect for Purity.*

Confident of the Lord's presence in our midst, we break forth into a hymn of joy, *Gloria in Excelsis*. It is an expanded form of an ancient messianic song, and is a stirring expression of praise to the majesty of God. During the seasons of Advent and Lent, it is usually not sung. In its place we sing the *Kyrie* or the *Trisagion*, either of which is a fitting acclamation for the penitential seasons of Advent and Lent. For today's Instructed Eucharist, however, we will sing the *Gloria*. Please turn to page 356.

- † *People sing Gloria in Excelsis, Hymn S-204.*

The **Collect of the Day** is a prayer with a simple theme, which at times summarizes, or "collects," the Biblical passages which follow. The "Amen" unites the clergy and the people and makes our prayers a common supplication of the whole Church. Please turn to page 357.

- † *Celebrant reads **Collect of the Day**.*
- † *The people may now be seated.*

Following the resurrection and ascension of Jesus, both Jews and Christians met and worshipped together in the synagogue. Later, both groups continued to use the synagogue but on different days. Christians met on the *first* day of the week, which we call "the Lord's Day," or "Sunday." The Jewish tradition continued as it had for

centuries, to worship God on the *last* day of the week, or “Sabbath,” which means “seventh.”

The Christian form of worship accommodates an integral part of Jewish worship: the reading of scripture. Scripture, according to the Jewish tradition, is to be heard *and* reflected upon. Our Christian Bible incorporates the Jewish scripture, which was later called the **Old Testament**.

A **lector** (reader of scripture) comes out of the congregation and reads the **Old Testament lesson**. After the reading, the people respond, “Thanks be to God!” So as to reflect on God’s Word, we observe a period of silence. We are in no rush. The lector usually leads us in the reading of the **Psalm**, which, for the sake of time, we shall not read this morning.

† *Lector reads the Old Testament lesson, followed by a period of silence.*

There were many letters written by the early Church leaders who knew Christ or his disciples. These letters, or **Epistles**, were addressed to early Christian communities and dealt with topics of faith and practice, both in the way they worshipped and in the way they lived their lives. Epistles were read aloud at the gathering of the Christian community. As we listen to these ancient letters, we are aware that we are in the midst of a tradition as old as the Church. Again, the people respond, “Thanks be to God!” Again, a period of silence.

† *Lector reads the Epistle, followed by silence.*

In the **Gospels**, Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John, we find the *Good News*: God’s mercy and love for us as witnessed in the earthly life of his Son, Jesus, the Christ. The word “Gospel” has its roots in the ancient Greek language, meaning “bearer of good news.” Centuries later we find the Anglo-Saxon word “God-Spell,” a story about God.

The movement of the Gospel into the midst of the congregation dramatizes its importance. A sequence hymn may be sung as the Gospel procession moves into the nave (where the people sit). Please stand and sing **Hymn 628, Help Us, O Lord**.

† *Acolytes and celebrant process into the midst of the congregation.*
† *The people, standing, face the Gospel.*
† *The celebrant says, “The Holy Gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ according to John.”*
† *The people respond, “Glory to you, Lord Christ.”*
† *The celebrant reads the Gospel, concluding by saying, “The Gospel of our Lord.”*
† *The people respond: “Praise to you, Lord Christ.”*
† *Acolytes and celebrant return.*

Believing that Christ makes himself present in his Word, we now would normally hear the Word interpreted and brought to modern-day life for us in the **Sermon**. Today **An Instructed Eucharist** itself becomes that sermon.

Having heard the Word of God proclaimed in scripture and sermon, we now join together in stating what we believe. This statement of faith is called the **Nicene Creed**. It was first formulated at the Council of Nicea in 325 A.D. Since that time it has been repeated by Christians in both East and West to reaffirm our loyalty to the living, triune God who is the center of all things, past and present. Please turn to page 358.

† *Celebrant and people say the Nicene Creed.*

Being the people of God carries with it the great responsibility of caring for others. In the **Prayers of the People** we accept this responsibility. As we pray for our neighbors and the world, we not only are asking God to do his work, but we are also offering ourselves as instruments of his peace and love and forgiveness. We burn Isaiah's words in our hearts: "Here am I, Lord. Send me!" (Isaiah 6:8). The Prayer Book provides that any person may lead us in these prayers. It is a time, also, to voice specific needs or concerns that are before us. Please turn to page 387.

† *Standing, the people are led in the Prayers of the People, Form III, page 387, by a member of the Congregation.*

† *Where designated, the people make their intercessions and petitions.*

In the **Confession of Sin**, we tell God that we are truly sorry for not living our lives as our Lord tells us. Not only do we hurt ourselves, but also others, or we have failed to act when we should have acted. Our Lord wants us to work in unity for the spread of his kingdom, but at times we haven't done our share, or have done it begrudgingly. We have failed, God, ourselves, and others, and we ask God to forgive us and strengthen us to do better in the days to come.

Through the priest we are assured in the Absolution that God forgives all of our sins, accepts who we are, and by binding us to himself, strengthens us to meet the future. As a Rite II Eucharist offers God's forgiveness and seeks to strengthen us, the Prayer Book instructs us that "on occasion, the confession may be omitted." Please turn to page 360.

† *Kneeling, the celebrant and people may say the Confession.*

† *Priest grants Absolution.*

The passing of the **Peace** is perhaps the oldest of our Christian traditions. As we pass and exchange the Peace of the Lord we are not simply saying "Hi" to each other, or wishing each other's troubles away. Instead, we are challenging each other to let the Holy Spirit act in our lives so that we may live our faith. We ask that his peace, not ours, be with each of us *before* we go to his table. Thus, the Peace is the bridge between the Word heard and the Word acted upon.

- † *All stand. The celebrant says: “The peace of the Lord be always with you.”*
- † *People: “And also with you.”*
- † *All may greet one another in the name of the Lord.*
- † *The congregation may be seated.*
- † *Announcements may be made.*

† † †

- † *The announcements being over, the people remain seated.*
- † *The reader continues:*

Now begins the second part of the service, **THE LITURGY OF THE TABLE**, or **The Holy Communion**.

Representatives of the congregation bring the **people’s offerings** of bread, wine, and money to the Lord’s table. In the early church, each worshipper brought his or her own gift of bread and wine, which represented offerings of life and labor from the fruits of God’s earth. Out of God’s creation come grain and grape, from which we make bread and wine. In turn, we offer them to God who transforms them into living, spiritual food and drink for our benefit (John 6:51-56).

The offering of money, or **alms**, represents our financial commitment to Christ’s work on earth. It is called our pledge, or tithe. It is to go for the work of the church.

The **table** is prepared by the deacon, if present. Bread is placed on the **paten**, or plate. Into the **chalice**, or cup, wine is poured.

When the table is ready, our alms are brought forward, and together with the bread and wine, are offered to God in an **Offertory** anthem.

- † *Celebrant says the Offertory sentence.*
- † *Oblationers bring the bread and wine to the table.*
- † *Ushers distribute the alms basins among the people.*
- † *The table is prepared.*
- † *During the Offertory, a hymn, psalm, or anthem may be sung, usually by the choir.*
- † *The ushers bring the people’s offerings of money and other gifts to the table.*
- † *The people stand while the offerings are presented.*
- † *All sing the Doxology.*

At the core of Eucharist is **The Great Thanksgiving**, and it embodies many parts. We begin with the *Sursum corda* (“Lift up your hearts”). It has been uttered by the faithful since the earliest days of the church.

We affirm that “it is right, and a good and joyful thing...” to give thanks to God, and because this is the season of Lent, the celebrant concludes with the **Proper Preface**.

We continue with the *Sanctus*, a magnificent anthem from Isaiah’s famous vision (6:1-3): “In the year that King Uzziah died, I saw the Lord seated on a throne, high and exalted...and above him were seraphs...calling to one another: *Holy, holy, holy is the Lord Almighty; the whole earth is full of his glory.*” Please turn to page 361.

- † *People and priest say Sursum corda.*
- † *Celebrant says Proper Preface.*
- † *All sing the **Sanctus, Hymn S-129.***

Next follows the **Prayer of Consecration**. We begin by praising God, who, in his infinite love, made us from himself. But we fall into sin. God, in his mercy, sent Jesus Christ “to share our human nature” so that we may be reconciled to him. We are assured that we are forgiven by God, the loving Father. And we are renewed and strengthened by his Holy Spirit.

When the celebrant holds up the bread and wine, we are united to Christ and his disciples in the Last Supper, which our Lord commanded them to do “for the remembrance of me.” “Remembrance” means “to recall,” or to “make present again.” We make present the past and ask Jesus through the Holy Spirit to make himself present within us through the elements of bread and wine. As we look forward in hope, we ask God’s blessing upon us.

This prayer concludes with a resounding “AMEN!”—“The Peoples’ Amen!”

- † *Celebrant reads Prayer of Consecration.*

The Great Thanksgiving concludes with the **Lord’s Prayer**. Jesus was praying in a certain place. When he ceased, one of his disciples said to him, “Lord, teach us to pray, as John taught his disciples” (Luke 11:1). And our Lord gave them this most sacred of all petitions. Please turn to page 364.

- † *Celebrant and people say the Lord’s Prayer.*

The practical purpose of the **Breaking of the Bread** is to divide it for the people’s communion. The celebrant holds it up and then breaks it. It is then shared by the people. Symbolically, this “elevation” and “fraction” represents the unity of our becoming part of the body of Christ who allowed himself to be “broken” for us. We are in communion with him, and he with us. We are invited to the feast!

- † *Celebrant: “Alleluia. Christ our Passover is sacrificed for us.*
- † *People: “Therefore let us keep the feast. Alleluia.”*

The celebrant offers the **Invitation** to the people: “The Gifts of God for the People of God.” The bread and wine have been set aside—made holy—by God for us. We are to “make Eucharist” and share the Gifts of God. Although we do not fully understand all that is happening, we nevertheless respond to God in our “hearts, by faith, with thanksgiving.”

Please turn to page 365. The Prayer Book adds that “during the ministration of the Communion, hymns, psalms, or anthems may be sung.” All are invited to sing.

- † *The people come forward to receive.*
- † *The people are invited to sing hymns during Communion: **Hymn 166** (“Sing My Tongue, the Glorious Battle”) and **Hymn 474** (“When I Survey the Wondrous Cross”).*

We offer a **Prayer of Thanksgiving** to God in which “we thank you for feeding us with the spiritual food of your Son our Savior Jesus Christ.” We have made Eucharist! We give thanks! We have been transformed and made new, indeed given new life! This is Good News! You may stand or kneel for this prayer. Please turn to page 366.

- † *Celebrant and people say Prayer of Thanksgiving.*

With the peace of God and the love of Christ in our hearts and minds and with the blessing of the Holy Trinity, we prepare ourselves to go into the world. Though often given, a Rite II Holy Eucharist does not call for a blessing; it is a blessing in itself.

- † *Celebrant gives blessing.*

Following the blessing, we sing a closing hymn as the choir, acolytes, and ministers exit. The congregation may stand and sing **Hymn 441**, *In the Cross of Christ I Glory*.

- † *All sing the closing hymn. The Choir and Celebrant process out.*

It has been said that the most sacred moment in the Eucharist is the **Dismissal**, the very *last* thing we do. The word “Mass,” which is often used for the Holy Eucharist or Holy Communion, comes from the Latin *dismissae* (“the dismissal”) or *mittere*, “to send.” God’s people, having been fed by Christ’s body, go forth to *be* the Body of Christ in the world. We have been nourished and strengthened and made new; for that, we give thanks to God. Now it is time to take up *his* life and *his* work. To heighten our awareness of our holy charge, we have placed the dismissal sign outside these doors.

The Liturgy is over, but not the Eucharist. Eucharist is what the parish—the community of faith—does. It is the way the parish lives: thankfully, joyfully, as a participant in the resurrected life of Christ and servant to the world. That which we have just symbolized in the Liturgy gets worked out in the day-to-day life of the parish and its members. That daily life, in turn, becomes the offering of our next liturgical celebration.

Eucharist is a way of life.

The Liturgy itself concludes quickly: the deacon or celebrant dismisses the congregation, and we respond with a short acclamation, followed by two “Alleluias.”

- † *Celebrant gives the Dismissal.*
- † *People respond: “Thanks be to God! Alleluia! Alleluia!”*
- † *The people may now depart in peace.*

For those who are interested in the further study of the Holy Eucharist, the following is a short bibliography:

Introducing the Proposed Book of Common Prayer, the Rev. Dr. Charles P. Price, 1977

Commentary on the American Prayer Book, the Rev. Dr. Marion J. Hatchett, 1980

The Holy Eucharist, Rite II: A Commentary, Associated Parishes, 1976

Parish Eucharist, Associated Parishes, 1977

The Shape of the Liturgy, Dom Gregory Dix (Roman Catholic), Westminster: Dacre Press, 1945

****You are invited to take this Instructed Eucharist with you!***