

Tea and Talk

21 October: The Liturgy of the Sacrament



Introduction

The **Eucharist** (also called the **Mass**, or **Holy Communion**) is the principal Christian act of worship, which we celebrate in obedience to the command of Jesus on the night of his betrayal. In the offering of the Eucharist we re-present the sacrifice of Calvary, and Jesus gives us his body and blood in bread and wine.

The Mass has four main sections: (1) The Gathering; (2) The Liturgy of the Word; (3) The Liturgy of the Sacrament; (4) The Dismissal. Today we look at **the Liturgy of the Sacrament**.

For I received from the Lord what I also handed on to you, that the Lord Jesus on the night when he was betrayed, took a loaf of bread, and when he had given thanks, he broke it and said, 'This is my body that is for you. Do this in remembrance of me.' In the same way he took the cup also, after supper, saying, 'This cup is the new covenant in my blood. Do this as often as you drink it in remembrance of me.' For as often as you eat this bread and drink the cup, you proclaim the Lord's death until he comes. (1 Corinthians 11.23-26)

The third part of the Mass is centred on the altar, and our obedience to Jesus's command to 'do this in remembrance of me'. The action of Jesus at the Last Supper — taking, blessing, breaking, sharing — is replicated in the Liturgy of the Sacrament in Offertory, Eucharistic Prayer, Fraction, and Distribution of Holy Communion.

1. The Peace

The Peace acts as a bridge between the Liturgy of the Word and the Liturgy of the Sacrament.

The peace of the Lord be always with you.
And also with you.

The way in which the Peace has is shared has changed a lot in recent years. Why do you think this is? Do you think the way we share the Peace is helpful, or does it miss the point?



So when you are offering your gift at the altar, if you remember that your brother or sister has something against you, leave your gift there before the altar and go; first be reconciled to your brother or sister, and then come and offer your gift. (Matthew 5.23-24)

And let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, to which indeed you were called in the one body. And be thankful. (Colossians 3.15)

2. The Offertory

The word 'Offertory' refers to the offering of bread and wine at this point in the Mass. (It does not refer to the collection, which also, appropriately, happens at this point.)

Bread and wine are brought in procession to the priest, demonstrating that the offering is made by the whole people of God.

The altar is prepared by a deacon (or another minister)

The celebrant says the Hebrew-style offertory prayers ('Blessed are you...'), *sotto voce* if a hymn is being sung

The altar is censed, a sign that in the bread and wine to be offered Christ will be present with us

Live in love, as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us, a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God. (Ephesians 5.2)

Every high priest chosen from among mortals is put in charge of things pertaining to God on their behalf, to offer gifts and sacrifices for sins. (Hebrews 5.1)

Pray, brothers and sisters, that my sacrifice and yours may be acceptable to God, the almighty Father. **May the Lord accept the sacrifice at your hands, for the praise and glory of his name, for our good, and the good of all his holy church.**

3. The Eucharistic Prayer

The Eucharistic Prayer is the climax of the Mass. It begins with the **Sursum corda**, a dialogue between celebrant and people, and continues with the **Preface**, which praises God for his mighty acts, and reflects the feast day or season of the church's year. (In the early church, these prefaces were extemporaneous.) This leads into the **Sanctus and Benedictus** sung by the whole congregation.



In the next part of the prayer the celebrant calls down the Holy Spirit to bless the bread and wine (the **Epiclesis**). The celebrant then repeats the **Words of Institution** used by Jesus at the Last Supper, and elevates the host and the chalice: the body and blood of Christ. In the **Anamnesis** the celebrant recalls the sacrifice of Calvary, which is being represented in the Eucharistic offering. The prayer concludes with a **doxology**. The people respond **Amen**, a sign of their consent to and participation in the prayer that has been offered.

When he was at the table with them, he took bread, blessed and broke it, and gave it to them. Then their eyes were opened, and they recognized him. (Luke 24.30-31)

"My Lord and my God!" (John 20.28)

I will lift up the cup of salvation. (Psalm 116.13)

For as often as you eat this bread and drink the cup, you proclaim the Lord's death until he comes. (1 Corinthians 11.26)

4. The Lord's Prayer, Fraction, Agnus Dei, and Invitation to Communion

At the heart of the Eucharistic action we pray the prayer Jesus taught his disciples.

Give us this day our daily bread.

The bread is broken, symbolic not only of Christ's broken body on the cross, but also of our incorporation into his body:

Though we are many, we are one body, because we share in one bread.

We sing the *Agnus Dei*, which leads into the Invitation to Communion, both recalling John the Baptist's identifying Jesus as the Lamb of God. As Christ the Passover Lamb was sacrificed for us, so too do we give thanks for this representation of that sacrifice in the Mass.

'Lord, teach us to pray, as John taught his disciples. He said to them, 'When you pray, say...' (Luke 11.1-2)

The next day he saw Jesus coming towards him and declared, 'Here is the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world!' (John 1.29)

5. The Distribution of Holy Communion

Perhaps the most intimate experience in the Eucharist for each individual, but also the one which most expresses our unity with the church in all ages and in all places. The faithful receive the body and the blood of the Lord.



The body of Christ. **Amen.**

The blood of Christ. **Amen.**

How do you feel when you receive Holy Communion?

When everyone who is receiving Communion has done so, the vessels are cleansed (the Ablutions), and the celebrant says or sings the Post-Communion Prayer.

'I am the bread of life. Whoever comes to me will never be hungry, and whoever believes in me will never be thirsty.' (John 6.35)

'This is the bread that comes down from heaven, so that one may eat of it and not die. I am the living bread that came down from heaven. Whoever eats of this bread will live for ever; and the bread that I will give for the life of the world is my flesh.' (John 6.50-51)

Next week...

We discuss the **Dismissal**, in which the people are blessed and sent out to share the good news of Jesus Christ.