

How to Worship at The Eucharist

From The People's Anglican Missal

The Eucharist is celebrated in obedience to the divine command, Do this in remembrance of me. Hence it is an action carried out in imitation of what our Lord did and said. One of the ancient names for the essential part of the Eucharist is The Action. Liturgical prayer combines action, or ceremonial, with words, and even with silence, all of which makes one complete act of prayer.

The Action, which is also called the Anaphora (that is, the Offering), has from earliest times been preceded by a preparatory service known as the Proanaphora, or in the Anglican colloquial phrase; the "Ante-Communion Service." The Proanaphora seems to have originated as follows. In the first days of the Church, when paganism prevented any proper observance of the Lord's Day, most Christians could find no opportunity in daytime for corporate worship, and hence it was customary for them to assemble for corporate worship at night when other folk were asleep.

Necessity may have dictated the hours at which the early Christians worshipped, but if so, they made a virtue of that necessity by the explanation which they gave to it. The fact that in the midst of the night our Lord was born into the world, and rose again from the dead, and was, as he had said, to come again in judgement, seemed to the first Christians to make these hours of darkness a time of special grace. They then explained that they proposed to be in the midst of his worship if he came in judgement in their time, as he had foretold, like a thief in the night.

Hence, as early at night as possible on the last day of the week, they congregated for a vigil of prayer which issued in the celebration of the Action in the early morning hours of the morrow. From this vigil service, which was based upon the Jewish Synagogue service of prayer, Psalms, Scripture-reading and instruction, there developed the Proanaphora, which was designed to be a service of instruction for those who were looking forward to Baptism (that is, for the Catechumens), and as a means of preparation for the Faithful who alone were permitted to be present at the Anaphora to receive the Holy Communion.

Hence the Proanaphora came to be known as the Mass of the Catechumens and the Anaphora as the Mass of the Faithful, and the Catechumens were always dismissed, along with any of the baptized who were under discipline for sin, just before the Mass of the Faithful was begun.

These two divisions are obvious in our Prayer Book rite. Our form of the Mass up to the Offertory consists of prayers of preparation, the reading of Scripture, and a Sermon or instruction, all which is the normal content of the Mass of the Catechumens in every part of the Church Catholic. Unfortunately, the Prayer-Book does not require the use of Psalms in the Eucharist, but in permitting the use of "hymns" it permits the use of Psalms which are the Church's first and greatest hymns.

Just as the Consecration provides the climax in the Mass of the Faithful, at which time our Lord is recognized as present with us sacramentally, to be the Object of our adoration and the Food of our souls, so the Gospel, as the ceremonial of Solemn Mass so well exemplifies, is the climax of the Mass of the Catechumens, since therein our Lord in his actions and teaching is exhibited for our instruction and imitation. Hence at the Gospel all stand, to shew their readiness to follow him, and there is always a Gospel procession, done with special solemnity at High Mass. Even at Low Mass the book is carried from the Epistle side to the north side.

Strictly speaking, the Creed, which was introduced into the Western Liturgy after the Catechumenate ceased to be of importance, belongs to the Mass of the Faithful. Hence, if the ancient customs of the Catechumenate were to be followed, the positions of the Creed and Sermon would need to be reversed, so that the Catechumens, and any of the baptized under discipline, could be dismissed before the faithful made their profession of belief, in which the Catechumens were not permitted to join since they had not yet made their initial profession of it in Baptism. Perhaps our indiscriminate use of the creed, which invites unbelievers and the poorly instructed to make a glorious act of faith which they are incapable of making, is a casting of pearls before swine. It may account for the popular contempt for the Creed.

The Mass of the Faithful consists of the Action, which is an imitation of what our Lord did and said in obedience to his divine command. do this in remembrance of me. We read that he did four things, namely, took Bread, gave thanks, brake it, and gave it to them. During the Action the Church also does these four things.

First, he "took" the Bread and Wine which were to be used for the Offering. This is technically known as the Oblation and is accomplished at the Offertory. And it should be noted that the taking of a collection is not the real Offertory, but merely the People's share in it, whereby they provide the means of buying the Bread and Wine and of supporting the Church and the poor. In the earliest times the Bread and Wine were collected at this point, and what was not needed for the Mass was used for the relief of the poor and for the physical sustenance of those who served at the Altar.

Secondly, our Lord "gave thanks." The Prayer-book following the Gregorian Canon, speaks of "this our Sacrifice of Praise and Thanksgiving." According to Jewish ideas, blessing or consecration was accomplished by a form of thanksgiving (that is, eucharist) wherein the worshipper identified himself with the One worshipped by praising and thanking the Lord and by eating what had through sacrifice become in a peculiar sense the Lord's possession. For this reason Consecration Prayer is eucharistic in tone. It begins with the Preface (Let us give thanks unto our Lord God) and continues in the form of thanksgiving. Identity with the One worshipped is asserted both in speech and action in the Words of Institution, wherein the Celebrant speaks in the Person of Christ (This is my body and This is my blood), and even imitates the divine actions. Hence it is not strange that at this first point of conscious identification with our Lord in speech and action, and in praise and thanksgiving, we should think of the Consecration as being consummated. It is to be recognized that even though the essential thing about the Eucharist is obedience to our Lord in performing his Action, the use of the Words of Institution do constitute a conscious act of identity with him as almost nothing else does.

At any rate, the Jewish idea of identification is worth remembering as a key for the interpretation of much that is significant in the Eucharist. Of course, it can never mean that the worshipper is so identified with the Object of his worship, and ceases to exist as an individual. But "Communion" means close union, which we are wont to describe as

identification; and this process of identification might be said to consist of four stages, thus: the initial step of offering (described above as Oblation), which is a prelude to the second step of acceptance for immolation (described above as Consecration). But Consecration gives over the victim to the use of the One worshipped, and is itself a prelude to union with the Object of worship. These two latter steps are described below as Utilization (signified by the Fracture) and Unification (accomplished in the act of Communion).

Thus, thirdly, after our Lord had effected the Consecration by the successive acts of taking the bread and wine and blessing it in the form of thanksgiving, he "broke" the Bread. This action, known as the Fracture, came to be dramatized as a visible sign of the great sacrifice wherein he was broken on the Cross for us, and with which, we must identify ourselves if that sacrifice is to be effective in our own souls. That is, sacrifice is a process whereby God makes use of us, for which reason this step in the Mass may well be named Utilization. Hence at this point we do well to think of the heartbreaks of suffering humanity and of our Lord's oneness with the sorrows of mankind, and of his being broken for us on the cross, even as we must make of our own heart-breaks a loving union with his sacrifice. Only by such devotion can the agony of mankind become a part of Christ's agony, and be utilized in the process of divine redemption instead of being lost in ignorance of his love and rebellion against his compassion.

Fourthly, our Lord "gave" to his disciples this heavenly Food to be the food of their souls, and to consummate their union with him, and this Unification is, of course, the climax of the Mass of the Faithful, the act of Communion. Anything after this great act except the briefest of thanksgivings would seem to be an anticlimax.

The Offertory, the Consecration, the Fracture, and the Communion are the chief acts of the Action, and the Church joyfully emphasizes these by her ceremonial dramatization of them, in reverent obedience to the command, DO THIS. Anything less than a very careful carrying out of these acts is but a meagre obedience to the expressed wish of our great High Priest. Because the Prayer-Book does not make as much of the Fracture as of the other acts, many Priests reinforce the present Prayer-Book usage by the addition of the ancient ceremonies thereof, as given in this Missal.

The Eucharist is sometimes defined as the making present on the Altar of the eternal sacrifice offered once for all on Calvary, so that it becomes available to us as the means whereby we can, through our Communion, be identified with him in his sacrificial consecration to God. Liturgical prayer is thus different from other kinds of prayer. It is THE WORSHIP WHICH CHRIST OFFERED ON CALVARY made present on the Altar as the worship of the Church on earth, and through the union which each worshipper has with Christ, the individual is thus enabled to offer Christ's own perfect act of Worship. Hence the Mass can never be an act of private devotion. It is always the act of the whole Church, the mystical Body of Christ, which exists only in and through Christ, and which alone possesses Christ since Christ - its head and life - is also in possession of the Church and of every soul therein which surrenders to him. He ordained the Eucharist as the means whereby we put ourselves into his possession and, in return, enter into possession of him. It is the Holy Communion of his broken Body and poured-out Blood. These words describe Christ as offered or sacrificed for us. That is, Holy Communion can only be a Communion because it is first of all a Sacrifice.

Hence the individual benefits thereby because he loses himself in that which Christ has ordained to be the corporate worship of all. Eucharistic worship is not a matter of personal edification but of self-forgetfulness. You go to Mass not to get but to give, for you can in this instance GET only by giving. "The price of love is thyself," says St. Augustine.

The individual ought therefore to exercise himself in certain acts during the Action. Four acts are indicated, as said above, conveniently known as OBLATION, CONSECRATION, UTILIZATION, and UNIFICATION, corresponding to the four acts of The Action.

First, consider Oblation. At the Offertory, when the Priest obeys the Prayer-Book Rubric, to "offer and place" upon the Holy Table, the Bread and the Wine, the worshipper may well remind himself that a gift should bring the giver with it--that just as his monetary offering, the fruit of his own labour, has helped provide this physical sustenance which is now offered and placed on the Altar, ready for consecration, so he should now complete the Offering, and give that which his Lord most desires. That is, at the Offertory he should offer and place himself in spirit upon the Altar, and thus make an oblation of himself at the time when the Priest offers thereon the physical sustenance of human life in the form of the Bread and Wine.

Secondly, there is consecration. When, at the Preface, the Priest begins the Consecration, the individual should realize that he too is being consecrated to God along with his offering of himself and of this physical sustenance for human life. And when mere physical sustenance has become sacramentally present, he should regard himself as a reasonable, holy, and living sacrifice, which has now become consecrated to God in union with Christ's sacrifice of himself. For in each Mass not only is the Bread and Wine consecrated but also each true worshipper.

Thirdly, there is Utilization. At the Fracture, when the Host is broken and the Particle is placed in the Chalice, the worshipper should, as it were, place his own sorrows, temptations, and aspirations, in the Chalice, along with those of all of broken humanity, that the same may be lifted up to God in praise and thanksgiving. The language of love is pain. It was so for Christ. It must be so for us because we are sinners needing redemption through this great sacrifice. Thus through the Sacrifice of Praise and Thanksgiving is life sweetened and strengthened because it is surrendered to him in its joy and in its anguish to be used for this holy and happy purpose. And even if the Priest does not himself make the greater Fracture, but contents himself with the little Fracture which the Prayer-Book orders during the Words of Institution, at any rate the worshipper need not abstain from making the devotions appropriate to the Fracture at this point.

Our religion is a religion of redemption. Every soul, no matter how marred by evil, can be redeemed, that is, purified, utilized, and restored by the grace of the atoning sacrifice. All pain, sorrow, frustration, disease, death, can be mere wastage, or it can be utilized by God and made into something fine for all eternity. We who are to be co-redeemers with Christ must lift up broken humanity into union with the lifting up of the broken Christ upon the Cross, and we may do this at least in intention at the Fracture, as a prelude to the reception of the Blessed Sacrament which is the means of our intermingling of ourselves with Christ in his redemption of the world.

This idea needs emphasis. Consider it a moment. The English version of the Apostles Creed calls the Church the Communion of the Saints. But to go back to the original Greek and Latin forms of this Creed, in accordance with the Anglican principle of always going back to the sources in order to establish the proper interpretation, we find its literal meaning to be "the Communion of the Holy." This phrase must indicate at least all these things: (a) The Church is the fellowship of those who are therefore partakers of, the holiness of God; (b) all in the Church are therefore in communion with the Saints, i.e., those who are filled with God's

holiness; but (c) holiness of dedication, according to the Jewish Scriptures, consists in being given over in sacrifice to God. This latter idea is the Jewish conception of holiness which our Lord accepted and taught. According to the Scriptures, holiness consists in being offered to God so as to be made by him fit and acceptable for his purposes. Christians are those who have accepted the Atonement (at-one-ment) made by Christ, which they can do only by entering into it and becoming part of it.

Thus the Holy catholic Church is the Communion of the Holy (or, as we say, the Communion of the Saints) because it consists of all those souls, living and dead, who have been offered to God through the sacrifice of Christ. You are a Christian only because you are a part of the redemptive process which Christ made possible by his sacrifice of himself. The Eucharist is Communion (that is, close union) with Christ our Sacrifice. There could be no Communion in the Christian sense of the word if this service of worship were not first of all the making present and available for us of the eternal sacrifice of Calvary.

Thus fourthly, there is Unification. That is, the reception of our Lord in the act of Holy Communion, as said above, is an intermingling of ourselves with him, in such wise that we can achieve identity of purpose with him in his thoughts, desires, strength, and living. The reception of Holy Communion is the expression of all that is holy in our religion, and when the worshipper knows himself to be unfit or unprepared, he should content himself with an act of Spiritual Communion lest he "eat and drink condemnation to himself."

The method of assisting at Mass outlined above consists in making oneself a part of the Action at each step. Surely this is the best method of "following the Service." Thereby each worshipper is able to experience the true inner meaning of the Eucharist. For therein we and ours, with praise and thanksgiving are offered to God through the eternal sacrifice on Calvary, which same is made present and available to us every time Mass is celebrated, and is the divinely ordained means of the renewal and of the maintenance of our union with Christ who is our Saviour because he is our Sacrifice.

To summarize:

1. OBLATION. At the offertory offer yourself along with the People's gifts on the Altar.
2. CONSECRATION. From the Preface onwards suffer yourself, with praise and thanksgiving, to be consecrated to God's service.
3. UTILIZATION. At the Fracture will yourself to be a sacrifice in union with Christ's broken Body and poured-out Blood, to be used as he wills.
4. UNIFICATION. At the Communion give yourself to Christ, even as he gives himself to you, so that you may then go forth in union with him.

The phrase Real Presence does not mean that there can be an unreal presence. Rather, the words Real Presence reject the contrary idea of the real absence of Christ in favour of what every devout Communicant knows from experience, namely, that in this Sacrament Christ makes himself available to us in his humanity (which is the fundamental meaning of the phrase Body and Blood) as well as in his divinity. The real and whole Christ is here, after a fashion which enables us to receive him. He is present everywhere as God, but not in such a way as to enable us to receive him as our spiritual Food. In his humanity he is present only (a) in heaven where he continually makes intercession for us in the presentation of his eternal sacrifice; and (b) in the Sacrament which he has ordained to be the means whereby his heavenly presence and sacrifice is made available for us on earth.