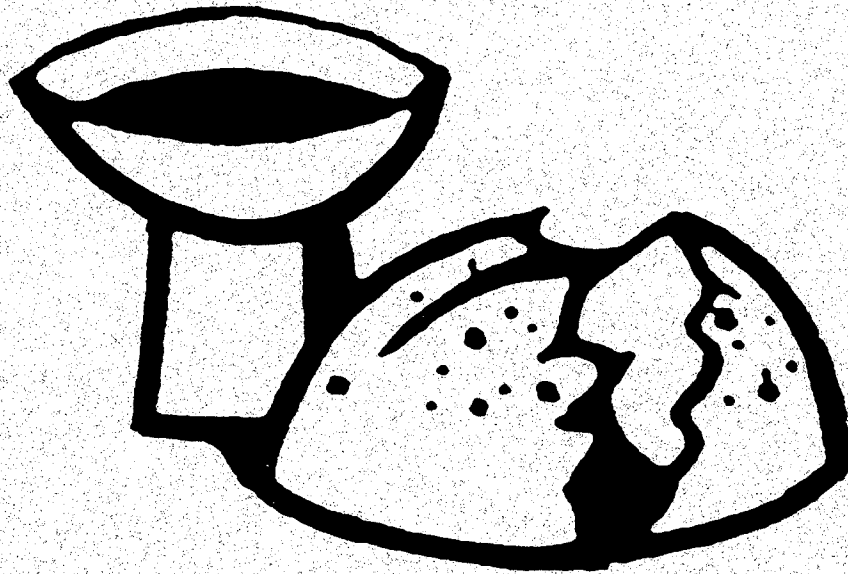


An Explanation of the Eucharist Rite II

by the Rev. James H. Pritchett, Jr.



St. John's Episcopal Church

3480 Main Street
College Park, GA
404.761-8402
st.johns@mindspring.com

*"When he was at table with them,
he took the bread
and blessed, and broke it, and gave it to them.
And their eyes were opened and they recognized him."
Luke 24:30, 31 (the Road to Emmaus)*

Introduction

Welcome to the worship of the Episcopal Church! Our liturgy (the way we worship) provides a means whereby God's people tell the story of God's grace and saving action while praising God and receiving nourishment and strength for our ministries to the world.

This booklet is intended to help those new to Episcopal worship as well as those who have been in the church for decades understand better what and why we say and do the things we do. Worship is much more meaningful if you know the history and intention of our words and actions.

Our worship is rich and steeped in tradition. We worship from the texts and prayers in the Book of Common Prayer. The Book of Common Prayer was first written by Thomas Cranmer, Archbishop of Canterbury, in 1549. He compiled many ancient prayers and patterns of worship. The Prayer Book has been revised numerous times, but its character remains the same. It is beautiful and reverent and joyous and challenging.

Our Prayer Book is like classical music. Its beauty and poetry have withstood the test of time as effective ways to praise God. Use of the Prayer Book does not mean we cannot or should not pray extemporaneously – we can and should just as a classical musician might also want to play jazz. But for Episcopalians, the Prayer Book is our statement of belief as well as the way we pray. We have long followed the motto: “Lex orandi, lex credendi,” or “as we pray, so we believe” (literally “the law or prayer, the law of belief.”).

You will find that regular attendance at worship will shape your character, even if a particular Sunday did not “feel good” or you thought the sermon was lousy. Where else in your life do you kneel and confess that you make mistakes? Where else are you told that you are loved unconditionally? Where else do you sing praises aloud? Where else do you share your faith and your struggles? Where else do you show publicly that you are a person who prays? We Christians worship because of who we are, and we become who we are because we worship. We are glad that you are engaged in that process of formation with us!

How This Booklet Works

The format below sets out the text (for Prayer A, Rite II) in the left column and commentary in the right column. After the text of the service are two essays, “Children and the Eucharist” and “A Word about Gestures and Postures,” as well as “A Final Word.”

I hope this booklet is helpful to you, and that your worship helps you live Christ's words that “you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind,” and “love your neighbor as yourself.” (Mt. 22:37-38.)

The Rev. James H. Pritchett, Jr.

The Holy Eucharist Rite Two

The Word of God

A hymn, psalm, or anthem may be sung.

The people standing, the Celebrant says

Blessed be God: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.
People And blessed be his kingdom, now and for ever.
Amen.

In place of the above, from Easter Day through the Day of Pentecost

Celebrant Alleluia. Christ is risen.
People The Lord is risen indeed. Alleluia.

In Lent and on other penitential occasions

Celebrant Bless the Lord who forgives all our sins;
People His mercy endures for ever.

The Celebrant may say

Almighty God, to you all hearts are open, all desires known,
and from you no secrets are hid: Cleanse the thoughts of our
hearts by the inspiration of your Holy Spirit, that we may
perfectly love you, and worthily magnify your holy Name;
through Christ our Lord. *Amen.*

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*When appointed, the following hymn or some other song of praise is
sung or said, all standing*

Glory to God in the highest,
and peace to his people on earth.

Lord God, heavenly King,
almighty God and Father,
we worship you, we give you thanks,
we praise you for your glory.

Lord Jesus Christ, only Son of the Father,
Lord God, Lamb of God,
you take away the sin of the world:
have mercy on us;
you are seated at the right hand of the Father:
receive our prayer.

We are gathered for the Holy Eucharist. "Eucharist" is Greek for "Thanksgiving." In Holy Eucharist, we are declaring that our fundamental life stance is one of thanksgiving to God.

There are two "rites" (texts) used in Holy Eucharist, Rite I and Rite II. There are a number of differences, but the most striking is that Rite I uses archaic language ("thee," "thy"), while Rite II uses contemporary language.

Liturgy means "work of the people." Our form of worship is interactive. It is not a spectator sport that the priest makes happen. The priest is merely the chief celebrant; we are all celebrants in this feast of thanksgiving. It is the participation of the people that causes worship to be meaningful.

A general point of interest: note the smaller text in italics, called "rubrics," or rules. Rubrics tell what must be done and when, yet give tremendous flexibility. Episcopalians recognize the Prayer Book service wherever they find it, yet local parishes have a great deal of choice in their worship.

We begin the first half of the service, the Liturgy of the Word, with an opening hymn. "He who sings prays twice."

There are three "opening acclamations." We begin our worship by blessing God's name. The acclamations are appropriate to different liturgical seasons. Because we are in Lent, we use the Lenten acclamation and response.

The priest may then say the "Collect for Purity." Many people recite this collect silently before worship begins. In it, we are asking God to help us worship. A Rabbi once was asked, "What do you do before praying." "I pray," he replied, "that I might pray properly."

Having gathered and prayed, we sing God's praises. Most Sundays of the year, we sing the "Gloria." The "Gloria" is a festive "canticle." A canticle is an ancient hymn of praise consisting of either Scripture or Latin poetry. The Gloria or other hymns of praise must be sung during Christmas and Easter seasons, but may not be used during Advent or Lent.

For you alone are the Holy One,
you alone are the Lord,
you alone are the Most High,
Jesus Christ,
with the Holy Spirit,
in the glory of God the Father. Amen.

On other occasions the following is used

Lord, have mercy. Kyrie eleison.
Christ, have mercy. or Christe eleison.
Lord, have mercy. Kyrie eleison.

or this

Holy God,
Holy and Mighty,
Holy Immortal One,
Have mercy upon us.

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The Collect of the Day

The Celebrant says to the people

 The Lord be with you.
People And also with you.
Celebrant Let us pray.

The Celebrant says the Collect.

People Amen.

The Lessons

The people sit. One or two Lessons, as appointed, are read, the Reader first saying

A Reading (Lesson) from _____ .

A citation giving chapter and verse may be added.

After each Reading, the Reader may say

 The Word of the Lord.
People Thanks be to God.

or the Reader may say Here ends the Reading (Epistle).

Silence may follow.

The "Kyrie" (kih-ree-ay), Greek for "Lord", and the "Trisagion" (tris-odge-gion), meaning "thrice-holy," are appropriate for use during Advent and Lent.

Next comes the Collect of the Day. A "Collect" ("col-lic", emphasis on the first syllable) is a short prayer which collects our thoughts. There is a different collect appointed for each Sunday. Many are ancient. Collects often consist of 5 parts: (1) an address to God (2) a description of an attribute of God or God's work, (3) a petition, (4) how we'll respond, and (5) a closing doxology, or song of praise. Many collects leave out one or more parts, but check out a few to see what's there and what's not!

After the collect come the lessons. In the Episcopal Church, we read as much (or more) Scripture as anybody! We usually read from the Old Testament, Psalms, New Testament Epistle, and Gospel.

The priest does not get to pick the readings. We follow the Common Lectionary used by many denominations. It provides for a three year cycle of readings (Years A, B, & C) and covers a great many "highlights" of the Bible. Each "synoptic" Gospel (Matthew, Mark, & Luke) has a year in which it is the primary Gospel reading. John's Gospel is sprinkled in during the year.

A Psalm, hymn, or anthem may follow each Reading.

Then, all standing, the Deacon or a Priest reads the Gospel, first saying

People The Holy Gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ
 according to _____
 Glory to you, Lord Christ.

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After the Gospel, the Reader says

People The Gospel of the Lord.
 Praise to you, Lord Christ.

The Sermon

On Sundays and other Major Feasts there follows, all standing

The Nicene Creed

We believe in one God,
the Father, the Almighty,
maker of heaven and earth,
of all that is, seen and unseen.

We believe in one Lord, Jesus Christ,
the only Son of God,
eternally begotten of the Father,
God from God, Light from Light,
true God from true God,
begotten, not made,
of one Being with the Father.
Through him all things were made.
For us and for our salvation
he came down from heaven:
by the power of the Holy Spirit
he became incarnate from the Virgin Mary,
and was made man.
For our sake he was crucified under Pontius Pilate;
he suffered death and was buried.
On the third day he rose again
in accordance with the Scriptures;
he ascended into heaven
and is seated at the right hand of the Father.

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He will come again in glory to judge the living and the dead,
and his kingdom will have no end.

Before the gospel reading, we sing a "sequence" hymn, which usually relates to the theme of the gospel or sermon.

The Gospel is highlighted by reading it in a Gospel Procession. It is the only lesson which must be read by a deacon or priest.

The sermon is an interpretation of the Scripture to make it relevant to us today. It is usually based on one or more of the readings.

Having prepared ourselves through prayer and praise and through the hearing and interpretation of God's word, we now recite the Nicene Creed (from the Latin meaning "We believe").

The Nicene Creed is an ancient statement of our basic beliefs. It was formulated at the first two ecumenical councils: Nicea in 325 A.D., and Constantinople in 381 A.D. It is the creed of the universal ("catholic") church, and it is used at the Eucharist.

The formulations in the Nicene Creed were in response to early heresies, especially that Christ was not fully God, but was a lesser, or demi-god. ("Arianism.") Our Trinitarian understanding of God is affirmed in the Creed.

The Apostles' Creed is the ancient creed of Baptism and is used during that service and during the daily offices (Morning & Evening Prayer).

We believe in the Holy Spirit, the Lord, the giver of life,
who proceeds from the Father and the Son.
With the Father and the Son he is worshiped and glorified.
He has spoken through the Prophets.
We believe in one holy catholic and apostolic Church.
We acknowledge one baptism for the forgiveness of sins.
We look for the resurrection of the dead,
and the life of the world to come. Amen.

The Prayers of the People

Prayer is offered with intercession for

*The Universal Church, its members, and its mission
The Nation and all in authority
The welfare of the world
The concerns of the local community
Those who suffer and those in any trouble
The departed (with commemoration of a saint when appropriate)*

See the forms beginning on page 383.

If there is no celebration of the Communion, or if a priest is not available, the service is concluded as directed on page 406.

Confession of Sin

A Confession of Sin is said here if it has not been said earlier. On occasion, the Confession may be omitted.

One of the sentences from the Penitential Order on page 351 may be said.

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The Deacon or Celebrant says

Let us confess our sins against God and our neighbor.

Silence may be kept.

Minister and People

Most merciful God,
we confess that we have sinned against you
in thought, word, and deed,
by what we have done,
and by what we have left undone.
We have not loved you with our whole heart;
we have not loved our neighbors as ourselves.
We are truly sorry and we humbly repent.
For the sake of your Son Jesus Christ,
have mercy on us and forgive us;
that we may delight in your will,
and walk in your ways,
to the glory of your Name. Amen.

The last part of the Creed addresses the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit is "God at work in the world and in the Church even now." The Church is "one" under Christ, "holy" because the Spirit guides it, "catholic" because it proclaims the whole faith to all people, and "apostolic" because it continues the teaching, fellowship, and mission of the apostles.

After stating our belief by reciting the Creed, we continue a 2nd Century practice by offering our prayers. The prayers are led by a lay person and can be in any form which prays for the 6 elements listed. Six forms are offered in the Prayer Book on pages 383-93. Form I is based on ancient litanies from the East. Form II is new to the '79 BCP and invites the people's petitions. Form III was adapted from the New Zealand BCP. Form IV uses an ancient form and was developed for the revised British BCP. Form V is another adaptation of an Eastern litany. Form VI is new to the '79 book and incorporates confession. Each form except Form VI ends with the priest saying a concluding collect.

The General Confession came into use during the Middle Ages as a result of the preoccupation with death and desire to be absolved in preparation.

Confession reminds us of our need for grace because by our acts and omissions we do not live lives in perfect harmony with God, our neighbors, or ourselves.

General Confession is also especially significant for us today. It reminds us that not all of our sins are individual; we live and participate in systems and cultures that do not respect the dignity of every human being.

This form of the confession is based on Jesus' Summary of the Law: we confess that we have not loved God with our whole heart and have not loved our neighbors as ourselves.

Confession is the only act of worship for which kneeling has always been the norm.

The Bishop when present, or the Priest, stands and says

Almighty God have mercy on you, forgive you all your sins through our Lord Jesus Christ, strengthen you in all goodness, and by the power of the Holy Spirit keep you in eternal life. Amen.

The Peace

All stand. The Celebrant says to the people

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

Then the Ministers and People may greet one another in the name of the Lord.

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The Holy Communion

The Celebrant may begin the Offertory with one of the sentences on page 376, or with some other sentence of Scripture.

During the Offertory, a hymn, psalm, or anthem may be sung.

Representatives of the congregation bring the people's offerings of bread and wine, and money or other gifts, to the deacon or celebrant. The people stand while the offerings are presented and placed on the Altar.

The Great Thanksgiving

Alternative forms will be found on page 367 and following.

Eucharistic Prayer A

The people remain standing. The Celebrant, whether bishop or priest, faces them and sings or says

People The Lord be with you.
Celebrant And also with you.
People Lift up your hearts.
Celebrant We lift them to the Lord.
People Let us give thanks to the Lord our God.
Celebrant It is right to give him thanks and praise.

Then, facing the Holy Table, the Celebrant proceeds

It is right, and a good and joyful thing, always and everywhere to give thanks to you, Father Almighty, Creator of heaven and earth.

The priest pronounces God's absolution. A fundamental tenant of our faith is that God forgives us even though we are undeserving. The priest does not make this happen; he or she only pronounces, in the name of the Church, what God has graciously done for all who desire it.

The Episcopal Church also offers the rite of private confession, called "Reconciliation of a Penitent." It may be conducted formally or informally, and many Episcopalians make use of it. The rule in Anglicanism concerning private confession is, "All can, some should, none must."

Having confessed our sins, we demonstrate our love for one another by

"Passing the Peace," a practice that dates back to the earliest days of the Church. This expression of harmony is the climax of the Liturgy of the Word. The 1979 Prayer Book restored the practice of greeting one another during the Peace.

Until now, the action has been at the prayer desks to highlight the Bible. At the beginning of the Liturgy of the Table, or Holy Communion, a priest sets the table, and the focus shifts to the altar.

Our gifts of money are not just support for a worthy charity. When we give to God, we are expressing our gratitude and making the statement that we do not worship money. "Your treasure is where your heart is." What do you treasure?

There are 4 Eucharistic Prayers in Rite II. This is prayer A. Peruse the others to compare. What is the emphasis of each?

"The Lord be with you" is the "salutation." It is an ancient way of calling a group to order for prayer.

"Lift up your hearts" (the "Sursum Corda") and the exchange that follows are a Jewish form of prayer. By saying "Let us give thanks" the celebrant is asking permission to say the prayer for those present. The people assent by saying, "It is right to give him thanks and praise."

Beginning here, some priests use the "orans" position, with arms outstretched and palms up. It was the normal posture for prayer in Christ's time.

Here a Proper Preface is sung or said on all Sundays, and on other occasions as appointed.

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Therefore we praise you, joining our voices with Angels and Archangels and with all the company of heaven, who for ever sing this hymn to proclaim the glory of your Name:

Celebrant and People

Holy, holy, holy Lord, God of power and might,
heaven and earth are full of your glory.
Hosanna in the highest.
Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord.
Hosanna in the highest.

The people stand or kneel.

Then the Celebrant continues

Holy and gracious Father: In your infinite love you made us for yourself; and, when we had fallen into sin and become subject to evil and death, you, in your mercy, sent Jesus Christ, your only and eternal Son, to share our human nature, to live and die as one of us, to reconcile us to you, the God and Father of all.

He stretched out his arms upon the cross, and offered himself in obedience to your will, a perfect sacrifice for the whole world.

At the following words concerning the bread, the Celebrant is to hold it or lay a hand upon it; and at the words concerning the cup, to hold or place a hand upon the cup and any other vessel containing wine to be consecrated.

On the night he was handed over to suffering and death, our Lord Jesus Christ took bread; and when he had given thanks to you, he broke it, and gave it to his disciples, and said, "Take, eat: This is my Body, which is given for you. Do this for the remembrance of me."

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After supper he took the cup of wine; and when he had given thanks, he gave it to them, and said, "Drink this, all of you: This is my Blood of the new Covenant, which is shed for you and for many for the forgiveness of sins. Whenever you drink it, do this for the remembrance of me."

At this point in the prayer, the celebrant inserts a proper preface. The proper prefaces are short prayers which reflect the season or occasion. This is where visitors really get lost! Help them out!

Our praise is not offered by us alone. We join the communion of saints in proclaiming the glory of God's name.

"Holy, Holy, Holy" (the "Sanctus") is the song of angels (Isaiah 6:3).

"Blessed is he who comes. . ." and "Hosanna . . ." (the "Benedictus") is the people's cry as Jesus enters Jerusalem (Mt. 21:9; Mk. 11:9-10). Your bulletin will direct you to music for the Sanctus (in the front part of the Hymnal).

The people may "Stand or kneel." When the Prayer Book gives options, the preferred one appears first. Standing is the most ancient posture for communal prayer. We stand during Easter season, recognizing that the Eucharist is a celebration of our salvation. Kneeling, however, is a posture that we do not experience outside church, and most parishioners kneel other times of the year. Either posture is OK. During Lent, most people choose to kneel.

Note how the Eucharistic Prayer concisely retells the story of creation, the Fall, our rejection of God, and God's invitation to reconciliation through Christ.

Much of this part of the prayer echos the Jewish Passover feast.

Does "This is my body or blood" refer only to the bread or wine, or to the gathering of the faithful in prayer, symbolized by bread and wine?

The appropriate question is not "What happens to the bread and wine?" but "What happens to us?"

"Remembrance" here is the Greek "anamnesis," (an-am-knee-sis) literally the opposite of amnesia. It means much more than just calling to mind. It means to "re-member," to "re-create" and cause to become present, alive and new again.

Therefore we proclaim the mystery of faith:

Celebrant and People

Christ has died.
Christ is risen.
Christ will come again.

The Celebrant continues

We celebrate the memorial of our redemption, O Father, in this sacrifice of praise and thanksgiving. Recalling his death, resurrection, and ascension, we offer you these gifts.

Sanctify them by your Holy Spirit to be for your people the Body and Blood of your Son, the holy food and drink of new and unending life in him. Sanctify us also that we may faithfully receive this holy Sacrament, and serve you in unity, constancy, and peace; and at the last day bring us with all your saints into the joy of your eternal kingdom.

All this we ask through your Son Jesus Christ. By him, and with him, and in him, in the unity of the Holy Spirit all honor and glory is yours, Almighty Father, now and for ever.
AMEN.

And now, as our Savior
Christ has taught us,
we are bold to say,

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People and Celebrant

Our Father, who art in heaven,
hallowed be thy Name,
thy kingdom come,
thy will be done,
on earth as it is in heaven.
Give us this day our daily bread.
And forgive us our trespasses,
as we forgive those
who trespass against us
And lead us not into temptation,
but deliver us from evil.
For thine is the kingdom,
and the power, and the glory,
for ever and ever. Amen.

The Breaking of the Bread

The Celebrant breaks the consecrated Bread.

A period of silence is kept.

We then proclaim the Christian hope, which is "to live with confidence in newness and fullness of life, and to await the coming of Christ in glory, and the completion of God's purpose for the world."

The Eucharist is the way by which the sacrifice of Christ is made present, and in which he unites us to his one offering of himself.

The priest then invokes the Holy Spirit. That prayer is called the "Epiclesis" (Epi-cléé-sis). Our prayer is that the Holy Spirit will sanctify our gifts and us.

To serve God in "unity, constancy, and peace" could be a summary of the goal of Christian life.

It is traditional to elevate the bread and wine here.

At the end of the song of praise the priest says while elevating the elements, we say, "Amen." This is the "Great Amen." When we say "amen" ("let it be so") we are confirming and assenting to what has been said. Recall that at the Sursum Corda, the priest received permission to say the prayer for the people. Here the people say "amen" to the completed prayer.

We then say the Lord's Prayer. The Lord's Prayer is part of every worship service. It is a very good prayer to teach children, and they learn it easily.

The Prayer Book includes a contemporary version, omitted here because of space. While it probably makes sense to teach the King James version since it is so widely used, pay attention to the archaic language. In particular, the word "trespasses" means "sins," not going on someone's lawn!

The breaking of the bread is the dramatic climax of the service. It is the only place where silence is required. The breaking symbolizes Christ's sacrifice for us, and it powerfully symbolizes that we cannot nourish or be nourished if we insist on remaining "intact." Like the bread, we must be broken open before we can share.

Then may be sung or said

[Alleluia.] Christ our Passover is sacrificed for us;
Therefore let us keep the feast. [Alleluia.]

In Lent, Alleluia is omitted, and may be omitted at other times except during Easter Season.

In place of, or in addition to, the preceding, some other suitable anthem may be used.

Facing the people, the Celebrant says the following Invitation

The Gifts of God for the People of God.

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and may add

Take them in remembrance that Christ died for you, and feed on him in your hearts by faith, with thanksgiving.

The ministers receive the Sacrament in both kinds, and then immediately deliver it to the people.

The Bread and the Cup are given to the communicants with these words

The Body (Blood) of our Lord Jesus Christ keep you in everlasting life. [Amen.]

or with these words

The Body of Christ, the bread of heaven. [Amen.]
The Blood of Christ, the cup of salvation. [Amen.]

During the ministration of Communion, hymns, psalms, or anthems may be sung.

When necessary, the Celebrant consecrates additional bread and wine, using the form on page 408.

After Communion, the Celebrant says

Let us pray.

Celebrant and People

Eternal God, heavenly Father,
you have graciously accepted us as living members
of your Son our Savior Jesus Christ,

Wafers have no theological significance. They are used for convenience. We occasionally use "real" bread.

At this point, the choir sings a "fraction anthem." It is so named because it is sung while the priests break the bread and prepare the pattens (plates) and chalices (cups) for communion.

The priest invites the people to communion. We (non-Jews) are made the "people of God" by God's grace through Christ and our willingness to accept the invitation in our hearts and with our lives.

We use "Lay Eucharistic Ministers" (or "Chaliceers") to assist the priest in administering the sacrament. They are licensed by the Bishop.

The people must always be offered both bread and wine. The practice of offering bread only was a complaint during the Reformation.

"The body of Christ . . ." "The blood of Christ. . ." These are the "words of institution."

Communion in the Episcopal Church is open to all baptized Christians.

Anglicans have always adhered to the belief in the "real presence" of Christ in the Eucharist. We have resisted, however, attempting to explain the mechanics of how that happens. Many Anglican, Roman Catholic, and Lutheran theologians now agree that the "real presence" is brought about by the community of faith gathered to pray and tell the story of Christ, and is symbolized by the nourishment of bread and wine.

There are two "post-communion prayers." Both are ways of expressing our gratitude to God for feeding us.

and you have fed us with spiritual food
in the Sacrament of his Body and Blood.
Send us now into the world in peace,
and grant us strength and courage
to love and serve you
with gladness and singleness of heart;
through Christ our Lord. Amen.

or the following

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Almighty and everliving God,
we thank you for feeding us with the spiritual food
of the most precious Body and Blood
of your Son our Savior Jesus Christ;
and for assuring us in these holy mysteries
that we are living members of the Body of your Son,
and heirs of your eternal kingdom.
And now, Father, send us out
to do the work you have given us to do,
to love and serve you
as faithful witnesses of Christ our Lord.
To him, to you, and to the Holy Spirit,
be honor and glory, now and for ever. Amen.

The Bishop when present, or the Priest, may bless the people.

The Deacon, or the Celebrant, dismisses them with these words

People Let us go forth in the name of Christ.
Thanks be to God.

or this

Deacon Go in peace to love and serve the Lord.
People Thanks be to God.

or this

Deacon Let us go forth into the world,
rejoicing in the power of the Spirit.
People Thanks be to God.

or this

Deacon Let us bless the Lord.
People Thanks be to God.

Both prayers are beautiful and packed with meaning as they gather up the varied meanings of Holy Communion: thanksgiving, mystery, grace, incorporation into Christ, fellowship in the church, and anticipation of the Kingdom of God.

The theme of the second prayer is more "eschatological" (es-kat-ta-logical), meaning "relating to the end"—purpose and completion—of time) because it speaks of us as "heirs" of God's "eternal kingdom."

Note how both prayers send us into the world. We do not come to church for solace only. We do not receive communion merely for the sake of our own souls. We are the Body of Christ in whom the message of reconciliation has been entrusted by God, and we come to be fed and strengthened so that we may be "sent into the world in peace" with "strength and courage" to "love and serve [God] with gladness and singleness of heart."

After the prayer, the priest pronounces a blessing. It can be in a variety of forms. During Lent, we use a rather solemn "Prayer over the People."

After the blessing, the ministers and choir process to the back of the church as we stand and sing the closing hymn.

The dismissal is given from the back of the church because our dismissal from the service is an entrance into our primary ministries—those to the world Monday through Saturday. The dismissal says, "You have been fed by God—go into the world as Ambassadors of Christ! The people respond, "Thanks be to God!" and the service is ended.

“To Such Belongs the Kingdom of Heaven” Children and the Eucharist

We often have children joining their parents during worship. Some parents get their younger children during the peace; some have them in church for the whole service. Older children are usually with us the whole time. Some folks love seeing the children and including them in our worship. Others are distracted by the noise and occasional confusion. (I, by the way, believe that unhappy or unruly children should be taken out). Some parents allow their children to receive communion, and some do not.

These different responses are the result of change. When I was a child, we kids were herded out in the middle of the service. And nobody was allowed to take communion until he or she was confirmed, either. Those are the “old days” that lots of Episcopalians remember.

But now, communion is open to all baptized Christians, and little, unconfirmed children are in the service and receive the sacrament.

What happened? The answer is an interesting bit of church history. In the early Church, baptism and confirmation were part of the same service. The priest would baptize, then the bishop would immediately confirm the baptism by anointing with oil of Chrism. Two developments made this unworkable. First, in the Fifth Century St. Augustine, arguing against the Pelagians who said we can earn our way into Heaven, so stressed the doctrine of Original Sin that instead of just convincing everyone that we rely on God’s grace, he scared parents everywhere into baptizing babies as their ticket into heaven.

By that time, however, there was no way that a bishop could possibly be present at the baptisms of all those babies. In the Fourth Century, when Christianity became the official religion of the Roman Empire, the Church went from being a relatively small movement to a huge institution. It was now no more reasonable to expect a bishop to be at every baptism than it would be to expect the president of Coca-Cola to fill every bottle.

So baptism and confirmation were divided. All sorts of theological justifications were given to explain this practical consequence, especially that confirmation was necessary to “complete” baptism. Parents were instructed to bring children to the bishop for confirmation, but travel was difficult and dangerous, and most Christians never saw a bishop or got confirmed.

Finally, in 1282 Archbishop Peckham, in response to the “damnable negligence” into which confirmation had fallen, issued a canon requiring that confirmation be a prerequisite to receiving communion. The canon was not based on any theological justification for why only confirmed Christians should receive; it was simply an inducement to get confirmed.

The Prayer Book tells us (on p. 298) that “Holy Baptism is full initiation. . . into Christ’s Body the Church.” As the Church began to recover the centrality of baptism in our lives as Christians, it began to make less and less sense that children “fully initiated” into the Body were not welcome at the Lord’s Table. In 1971, the House of Bishops stated that confirmation should not be required to receive communion. In 1988, the Bishops set forth the official teaching of the Church, stating that “those Baptized in infancy may, as full members of The Body of Christ, begin receiving communion at any time they desire and their parents permit.”

Some parents withhold communion because their child “does not understand.” “Eucharist” is Greek for “Thanksgiving.” I think that if parents explain something like, “We are having a meal together to thank God for being with us,” most children will get the message. After all, they understand the message of love at the family feast on Thanksgiving Day without being able to recite facts about Pilgrims and Indians. The decision is up to parents, and we all respect that. But it pains me when a child reaches up, and a parent pushes the little hands back down. Rules, regulations, and church history aside, I believe participation in communion is formative for children, and it is important.

Finally, rather than tolerating our children in our worship, I think we should learn from them. They are part of us, and a part that we adults often lose. Jesus said, “Let the little children come to me . . . for to such belongs the kingdom of God.” We all belong to the kingdom in the manner of childhood—by virtue of grace not earned by our adult talents, skills, intellect, or accomplishments. We should not only tolerate these little faces full of wonder as they receive, we should give thanks that they are there. They are our teachers.

An "Athletic" Service?: A Word about Gestures and Postures

A friend told me about the time he brought his Baptist-born-and-raised mother to the parish where I was serving. Coming from such a different tradition, she was clearly wary of the entire experience, but, striving mightily to say something nice, commented, "Well, dear, it's a very athletic service, isn't it?"

To those not familiar with our liturgy, we do seem to be up and down a lot, and some folks make lots of gestures. Here's the low-down on postures and gestures:

Postures: The ancient practice was to stand for all communal prayer and singing, sit for the lessons, and kneel for confession. We still sit for the lessons and kneel for confession, but many of us now kneel for the Eucharistic Prayer as well.

The early church understood standing for the prayers as a symbol of our approach to God as children rather than slaves, as a symbol of our having been raised in Jesus Christ, and as reminiscent of the command to eat the Passover in haste so that one may be ready to go about the Lord's business. The practice of kneeling for anything other than confession did not come into being until the late Middle Ages. The change came about because the theology and architecture of that day increasingly separated the people from the "action" of the liturgy. Churches were built with long chancels (the area where our choir stalls are located) which placed the people a great distance from the table. To make matters worse, the table was placed against the wall and the priest faced it and turned his back to the people. In time, priests even began to say the prayers silently.

The people were discouraged from taking Communion because of their "morally corrupt" condition, and thus there was little for them to do as "participants" in the liturgy other than to kneel for private prayer.

From this beginning comes the present day practice of kneeling for the Eucharistic Prayer and the occasional misunderstanding that the service is a time for personal prayer and reflection.

The 1979 Prayer Book allows standing or kneeling for the Eucharistic Prayer. I encourage the parish to stand during Easter, in accordance with a tradition that goes back to the fourth century. Church history aside, some people find kneeling to be a reverent posture for the prayer, especially when we live in a world which encourages us not to humble ourselves before anything, especially God. Others embrace the early church rationale for standing (through Christ, we have been made "worthy to stand before the Lord.") You are welcome do whichever you prefer!

Gestures: Many people bow as the processional cross passes by. This is a sign of reverence. Some cross themselves when the celebrant says the opening acclamation, at the part of the creed that refers to the resurrection, when they receive the sacrament, and when the priest gives the blessing. Crossing oneself is an ancient acknowledgement of having received a blessing. Some people acknowledge the Gospel by making small crosses on their forehead, mouth, and heart. This is a way of saying, "let the Holy Gospel live in my mind, my words, and my heart."

There are historical reasons for many of these practices, and sometimes the practice has become dissociated from its historic meaning. My advice is not to worry. Gestures are not required nor restricted. If the gesture is meaningful to you in your worship, do it. If you are merely doing it out of rote, you might want to question the practice.

A Final Word

I hope this manual has answered some questions, but I also hope it has raised some. Ask a priest; if we don't know, we'll find out. Or investigate our wonderful library and read about liturgy. The more you know, the more meaningful it will be and you will become a teacher. Perhaps you will teach by telling others what you've learned. But you will probably teach in the most powerful way, by showing on your face and in your life how important your faith and worship of God is to you.

Go in peace, to love and serve the Lord!