



EPISCOPAL CHURCH OF THE
Transfiguration

SEEKING AND SERVING CHRIST IN ALL PERSONS

Instructed Eucharist



Introduction

For nearly 2,000 years, Christians have come together week after week to remember the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus and to experience him in their midst. We call it “Eucharist,” which is an ancient Greek word meaning “thanksgiving.” But Eucharist is only one name for this service. Sometimes it is called Holy Communion, the Lord’s Supper, or the Mass. By whatever name we call it, the Sunday Eucharist is the core of our life together as a church.

Our worship goes beyond us as individuals or a church. Worship is about and for God. Worship honors a deep, divinely implanted need in us to offer praise and thanks to God. As *The Book of Common Prayer* says, “We praise God, not to obtain anything, but because God’s Being draws praise from us (BCP, 857).”

In Eucharist, we communicate with God not only with words but with our every sense: we listen with our ears, gaze upon holy things with our eyes, touch the water, taste the bread and wine, and smell the rich fragrance of incense. Worship is meant to be a full body experience.

We begin our worship as we focus our hearts. That can occur as we travel to church, walk through the doors, touch the Holy Water Font, or listen to the musical prelude. The few minutes immediately before the service are an important time to quiet our minds and settle into the prayerful environment of worship.

Opening Procession

At the chime of the Sacring Bell, we stand for the procession of the cross and to sing an opening hymn. It is appropriate to bow in reverence at the cross, and also to sing the hymn, regardless of how you feel or what you believe to be the quality of your voice. In worship, our prayer and singing is not a performance, and we are not judged on our talent. We simply join our voices with all of Creation in praising the one who made us and loves us and calls us his own.

Liturgy of the Word

There are two halves to every service of Holy Eucharist. The first half is known as “the Liturgy of the Word,” and it begins with the Opening Acclamation.

Opening Acclamation

These words vary with the seasons of the Church, and we are currently using the most common: “Blessed be God: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit,” to which we respond, “And blessed be his kingdom, now and forever. Amen.” During Lent the acclamation begins “Bless the Lord who forgives all our sins,” and during Easter it begins, “Alleluia! Christ is risen!” Slight changes like these help us mark the different seasons of the church year.

Many Episcopalians make the sign of the cross during the opening acclamation, and elsewhere in the service. This practice dates back to the 2nd century, and helps us physically connect the thoughts of our minds and the feelings of our hearts with the actions of our bodies. It is not required, and there are no specific directions about it in the prayer book, but there are two traditional occasions when we cross ourselves:

- First, in response to words of blessing, whether direct or implied. Examples would be here at the opening of the service (“Blessed be God”), when the priest declares the absolution of sin, at the Sanctus (“Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord”), during the Eucharist when we ask for God’s blessing on ourselves, at the concluding blessing, and nearly every occasion when we invoke the name of the Holy Trinity.
- And we also traditionally cross ourselves when we pray for the dead and in hopes of the resurrection. This is why we make the sign of the cross during the prayers of the people at the remembrance of the deceased, and during the Creed when we remember “the life of the world to come.”

Ultimately, manual actions are about connecting our whole body with the worship of God. They help us pay more attention to the words, to focus us more closely upon the sacredness of what is happening, and to connect us more fully with the God we worship. More will be said later on about other manual actions in the liturgy.

Collect for Purity

Then we pray an introductory prayer called the Collect of Purity. A collect is a prayer that *collects* our thoughts together in one focus, and this prayer sets the tone for the whole rest of the service by acknowledging that we can keep no secrets from God, and that we need God’s help to love and magnify him in our worship.

Song of Praise

We continue our worship with a Song of Praise. Often this is the “*Gloria*,” an ancient hymn drawn from the song of the angels to the shepherds on the night of Christ’s birth: “Glory to God in the highest heaven and on earth peace among those whom he favors” (Lk 2:14). During Lent, we typically say or sing the *Kyrie*, part of the Greek phrase for “Lord, have mercy,” and during Advent we typically say or sing the *Trisagion*, an ancient Eastern Orthodox hymn translated “Holy God, holy and mighty, holy immortal one, have mercy on us.”

Collect of the Day

Then the Celebrant (the presiding priest) prays one final introductory prayer, a collect appointed for

Liturgy of the Word

that particular day. Most of the collects used in our worship are many centuries old and have been prayed by countless people in countless churches. The prayer is introduced by an ancient exchange between the Celebrant and People called the Salutation: “The Lord be with you.” “And also with you.” The phrases come from the story of Ruth in the Bible, and they are used at various times in worship to get our attention and prepare us to pray.

During this prayer, and at other times in the service, it is traditional to gently bow in reverence at the name of Jesus Christ. A good rule of thumb is to bow at our Lord’s name whenever you are standing, and not necessarily when you are seated. We bow for much the same reasons that we cross ourselves: to help us pay attention and offer God our full devotion.

Readings

The heart of the first half of the service is the reading of Scripture. The word “Bible” comes from the middle-English word that means “book,” so in essence, what we’re doing is like taking a few books down from the shelves of a holy library and sharing sacred stories with one another.

In our liturgy, we normally use four readings from Holy Scripture.

1. First, we hear a lesson from Hebrew Scriptures, often called the “Old Testament.” This was the Bible of Jesus and the disciples, and it still communicates God’s truth to us today.
2. Next, we sing or say a psalm. The Psalter was the songbook of ancient Israel and the early church, and psalms are at the heart of all religious communities who pray multiple times a day.
3. Then we hear from one of the non-Gospel books of the New Testament. The apostle Paul and other early Christian leaders strengthened the fledgling Church by their writings, and they still speak to us today.
4. Finally, we stand to hear a passage from one of the four Gospels telling us a story about the life and ministry of Jesus.

The passages are assigned for each Sunday in a three-year rotating cycle called the “Revised Common Lectionary.” This enables us to hear the same biblical passages that are read in all other Episcopal churches, and in most Roman Catholic and Protestant churches, as well. The use of a common lectionary is fairly modern, and it helps connect us together, despite our differences.

At the end of each lesson, the reader says, “The Word of the Lord.” This is said after all readings, even the ones we don’t particularly understand or like very much. Not all of Scripture is comforting or assuring, and some of what we encounter in Scripture makes us uncomfortable. But the same is true of God, who both comforts and challenges us, and so our reply is always “Thanks be to God.”

The final reading is always the Gospel, or a story from the life and ministry of Jesus Christ. At Transfiguration, we have a Gospel Procession, when the Gospel Book is carried from the Altar into the Nave to signify that the Good News of Jesus Christ is at the center of our life as a church. As the Gospel Book is processed into the Nave, we usually sing an Alleluia. This tradition dates back to the 3rd century, and helps us anticipate the reading of the Gospel.

It is appropriate for a deacon to read the gospel, but if a deacon is not present, a priest may do so. Acolytes carrying torches flank the book, serving both a practical and symbolic function of giving light. As the Gospel reading is introduced, it is customary to make the sign of the cross with on your forehead, mouth, and chest, signifying our desire that the gospel will dwell in our minds, on our lips, and in our hearts.

Liturgy of the Word

Sermon

After the readings, a preacher attempts to make connections between God's Word and our everyday lives. Sermons are intended to help us live more faithfully as disciples of Jesus, and so they can variously seek to inspire, challenge, or offer comfort. Preachers often have special training, but in truth anyone with a heart for God and the confidence to share the Good News can be licensed to preach.

The Nicene Creed

Following the sermon, the congregation stands to profess one of the ancient statements of the Christian faith known as creeds, from the Latin word "credo" meaning "I believe." The Apostles and Nicene Creeds are two of the church's earliest attempts to make sense of God's identity as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. We say, "We believe," because our Christian heritage is grander, richer, and more mysterious than any one of us understands on our own, so we must share it with those around us, as well as all who have gone before and will come after.

Prayers of the People

After the Nicene Creed, we turn our attention to praying for the Church and for the world. The Intercessions provide a time to pray for the universal Church, for the nation and all in authority, for the welfare of the world, for our local community, for those who suffer and those in trouble, for the departed, and for any other special needs or concerns. These prayers are called "Prayers of the People" because they represent our deepest longings as God's people at prayer.

Confession of Sin

Following our prayers, we kneel to confess our sins and receive God's forgiveness. The confession is omitted during Eastertide, according to ancient tradition. Before speaking the words of the confession together, we experience a time of quiet to allow space for remembering those things from which we repent. True confession is not rote or thoughtless, but earnest and deeply felt. Then we recite together the words of confession. Notice that, as with the Nicene Creed, we use plural language: "We confess that we have sinned..." This is what is called a "general confession," because we are confessing generally our sins and our need for God's forgiveness. Sin does not happen alone or in a vacuum. Sin is like a web that connects us to one another, and so our confession is similarly communal. Individual confession is also encouraged, and our prayer book contains a separate rite for individual use with a priest.

The Absolution

After we have confessed our sins, the Celebrant stands and declares that all our sins have been put away by the mercy of Jesus Christ. God forgives without condition, but our repentance and commitment to righteous living closes the loop and transforms forgiveness into reconciliation.

The Peace

The Liturgy of the Word concludes with the passing of the Peace. The resurrected Jesus' first words to his friends were "Peace be with you," and here we speak that same holy greeting to one another. But contrary to the way it might look, the Peace is not simply a time to greet our family and friends. In the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus says, "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 (5:23)." Therefore, the Peace is a sacred time immediately before communion for us to show our reconciliation with each other, and especially with those from whom we have been estranged.

The Great Thanksgiving

After the Peace, we move into the second half of the service, known as the Great Thanksgiving or Holy Communion, and it begins as we make an offering to show our thankfulness for all we have and all we are. Here at Transfiguration, our offerings come in two parts: bread and wine, and a collection in the plates. Scripture directs that our offering should be a “sacrifice,” that is, a significant portion of our life and labor, and though today we commonly give money, in ancient times people gave produce from their fields, animals from their herds, or other objects of their livelihood. We stand as the offerings are carried and presented at the Altar, because they represent our entire lives, everything we are offering to be blessed, broken, and transformed by God.

The Offertory

During the Offertory, the Deacon “sets the table” with the help of an Acolyte, preparing the paten with the communion bread, and filling a single chalice with wine. Later more chalices and patens will be brought out, but the meal is centered around the one bread and one cup.

As the Deacon and Acolyte prepare the Altar with the offerings of bread and wine, and the Ushers collect the monetary offering, our Choir helps us present one more offering to God. The Anthem is more than cover music; it is an offering of beautiful sound that elevates our hearts and prepares us for the holy meal to come.

Sursum Corda

When the Altar has been prepared, the Great Thanksgiving begins with a piece of sacred dialogue between the Celebrant and People. It is called the “Sursum Corda,” a Latin phrase meaning “lift up your hearts.” In these few phrases, we declare our shared desire to lift our hearts to God, remembering all of God’s works of love and redemption. Here at Transfiguration, we often sing the Sursum Corda and much of the Eucharist to an ancient chant setting, because singing adds an additional dimension to our act of prayer. It heightens the emotion and devotion of our whole act. As St. Augustine is famed to have said, “The one who sings prays twice.”

For much of the Eucharistic Prayer, the Celebrants holds his or her hands out with palms up. This is called the *orans* position, and it traces back to ancient Judaism and the words of the Psalmist, who says, “I will bless you as long as I live; I will lift up my hands and call on your name (63:4).”

In the early Church, everyone in the congregation stood for all prayers, and not only because there were no pews for sitting or kneeling. They stood to honor the way that in the resurrection of Christ, we have been made worthy to stand before God. Some choose to kneel during the prayer, as a demonstration of humility and reverence. The prayer book is clear that you may choose either posture, though sitting for prayer is discouraged unless you are unable to stand or kneel.

Sanctus

After the Sursum Corda we sing the *Sanctus*:

*Holy, Holy, Holy Lord, God of power and mighty,
heaven and earth are full of your glory.*

In the Book of Isaiah, these are the words used by the seraphim to offer eternal praise to God (6:3). The *Sanctus* reminds us that our act of praise and thanksgiving occurs mystically together with all the faithful throughout time who eternally praise and worship God. Many choose to bow low while singing these words, to demonstrate awe and humility before the holiness of God.

The Great Thanksgiving

Just before we sing the *Sanctus*, an acolyte strikes a bell three times. This bell is called the Sanctus Bell, because it is traditionally rung three times at the *Sanctus*, and to call attention to other important moments in the Eucharistic Prayer.

Institution and Invocation

After the *Sanctus*, the prayer focuses on remembering: how God has loved us since the beginning of creation; how we have turned away from God; and how God came to save us in the person of Jesus Christ. The culmination of our remembrance is when we remember Jesus' last meal with his friends and the words he spoke over the bread and the wine. These words are called "the words of institution." At the time of the words of institution, the priest is required to touch the bread and the wine as an act of blessing. This is the only action the prayer book mandates. Traditions have developed in some churches, such as elevating the bread and wine at these words, with the people bowing or genuflecting and crossing themselves, in the belief that the elements have been transformed at this moment into the body and blood of Christ. Our practice at Transfiguration is only to elevate and bow at the end of the whole Eucharistic Prayer, because it is not until we have asked the Holy Spirit to transform the gifts that they become the Sacrament.

In fact, we ask for God to send the presence of the Holy Spirit twice during the prayer. First, we ask the Holy Spirit to descend upon the gifts of bread and wine and transform them into the body and blood of Christ. Then, we ask the Holy Spirit to descend upon us also, and at this point, we make the sign of the cross on ourselves. In both places, we are asking God to sanctify, or make holy, the gifts that we have brought to this place: the gifts of bread and wine, and the gifts of our souls and bodies.

The Great Amen

As with most prayers, the Eucharistic Prayer concludes with a final Amen, but this Amen is so important that it is known as the "Great Amen"—something signified in the prayer book by the way it is printed in capital letters. The word "Amen" is simply an ancient statement of affirmation. It's sort of like saying, "Yes, I believe that. Those words are my words, too." The Great Amen is so important that tradition suggests there must be at least one person present at a Eucharist besides the Celebrant so that there is someone to say the Great Amen. Here, after the Great Amen, we make a solemn bow in reverence of the consecrated Sacrament.

The Lord's Prayer

Following the Eucharistic Prayer, we recite together the Lord's Prayer. This is the only prayer that we say in every public act of worship in the Episcopal Church.

The Fraction

Then the Celebrant breaks the bread, in what is known as the "Fraction." It calls to mind not only Christ being broken on the cross for us, but also the story from Luke's Gospel of the disciples recognizing the risen Jesus at supper in Emmaus only when they broke the bread.

Following the Fraction, there is a significant period of silence. This silence echoes the great silence that the gospels say came over the whole earth in the moments after Christ's death. It is a moment of deep holiness, reverence, and awe. Sometimes silence communicates more truthfully than even our best words.

The Great Thanksgiving

Finally, we sing a fraction anthem, which is our way of summing up what happens in the breaking of the bread. Often this is the phrase, “Alleluia, Christ our Passover is sacrificed for us / Therefore let us keep the feast.” Passover was the night of Israel’s deliverance from slavery in Egypt, and the Passover meal was the meal Jesus shared with his friends in the Last Supper. But since the early days of the church, Christians have understood the Passion of Christ to be the *final* Passover, and have compared Jesus to the Passover lamb. We occasionally sing other anthems at the Fraction, depending on the season or theme of the day, but they all draw our minds to the mystery of Christ’s presence and sacrifice.

Communion of the People

All baptized Christians are invited to receive communion, regardless of age or church membership. Those who have not been baptized are welcome to receive a blessing, a desire signified by crossing your arms over your chest. You may stand or kneel at the altar rail, for the same reasons you may stand or kneel during the Eucharistic Prayer.

In the Episcopal Church, we administer both bread and wine to everyone, and you are encouraged to receive in both kinds. The word “receive” is important, for we do not “take” communion or “make our” communion.” We *receive* it. This is an experience of grace, of our Lord making himself known and available to us, and so we receive it as a gift with humility and gratitude. This is why we hold out our open hands in hopeful expectation, rather than taking the host from the priest.

Gluten-free host are available, and you indicate your desire for this by holding your hands out palms-down. The traditional manner of receiving the wine is to guide the cup to your lips and take a small drink, though if you leave the host in your hands the Eucharistic Minister will dip it in the wine and place it in your mouth. It is appropriate to say “Amen” after the minister says the words of communication when receiving both the bread and wine.

The shared cup is one of the most powerful symbols of communion. It is a sign of unity, thanksgiving, and our common life together. Rich and poor, old and young, black or white...we all drink from the common cup. When we let our discomfort at sharing the cup with strangers, or our fear of disease or sickness prevent us from sharing this holy moment, we lose something of its transforming power on our lives. We put up boundaries between one another that Christ died to tear down. Sharing communion this intimately demonstrates our desire to be part of God’s one, common family.

When Communion is finished, the remaining bread and wine are reverently consumed, or else they are reserved in the Tabernacle behind the Altar. This Reserved Sacrament is used for pastoral visits to the sick or shut-in, and to maintain Christ’s presence in our church throughout the week. This is why we bow or genuflect when approaching the Altar, because of Christ’s presence in the Tabernacle, and it is also the reason for the candle burning in a lamp above the Sanctuary. This candle is extinguished only once a year, on Good Friday, and it is lit anew from the Paschal Candle at the conclusion of the Great Vigil of Easter.

The Great Thanksgiving

Post Communion Prayer

After everyone has communed and the Altar is cleared, we say together the post communion prayer, in which we give thanks for what we have just received, and we ask Christ's presence to strengthen us for service in the world.

The Blessing

Then the Celebrant pronounces God's blessing in the name of the Holy Trinity, and the Deacon sends us out. This is a final reminder that the Eucharist is not an end unto itself, but is nourishment for all that we do beyond this place.

The Dismissal

In fact, the word "Mass" comes from the Latin word for dismissal. We are not allowed to linger; we are called to go back out into the world and do the work we have been given by God to do. We have been fed with Word and Sacrament, and strengthened to follow Christ wherever he may go.

Worship is over. Our service begins.

