

## 5. Holy Communion

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### 1. Some Basic Views of the Supper

Roman and the Eastern Orthodox believe the Real Presence of Christ exists in the Supper in substance terms. That is, they contend that a miracle occurs at every Eucharist when the words “*This is my body . . . This is my blood*” are spoken by a lawfully ordained priest: ordinary wafers and wine become the actual body and blood of Christ. (It could also be remembered that some Anglicans hold such a view too although this is directly contradicted by the 39 Articles [Article 28].)

Lutherans believe that the Real Presence is not substantial in terms of the bread and wine but that the Real Presence of Christ is necessarily “in, under and around” the elements in the Supper (hence, *con*-substantiation). On the other hand, Ulrich Zwingli, the famous Swiss Reformer, disputing with Luther about the matter, said that the Supper is merely an ordinance or a memorial feast and nothing more. Churches such as Baptist and Church of Christ in particular along with Pentecostal churches hold an essentially Zwinglian view of the Supper.

Thomas Cranmer is said to have finally followed John Calvin in this respect who said that the Real Presence of Christ is in heaven so it cannot be on earth. Nevertheless, we may “spiritually” feast on him by faith in the Supper. So *Article 28* reads, “The Body of Christ is given, taken, and eaten, in the Supper, *only after an heavenly and spiritual manner. And the mean [sic] whereby the Body of Christ is received and eaten in the Supper is Faith*” (emphasis mine). In other words, the miracle occurring at every Supper is not on the altar but in the hearts of those who receive the bread and wine in faith.

## **2. The Lord's Supper: A Symbol of Faith**

### **a) Introduction**

One of the responsibilities we have towards our brothers and sisters in Christ is that we do not forsake the gathering together of the brotherhood. When we gather, we are to do so in a particular way. Jesus asked that we share together in a symbolic meal. This is called the "Lord's Supper" or the "Holy Communion". It is a meal which uses symbols of bread and wine to remind us of Jesus' death on our behalf. Feeding on these symbols is an outward expression of believing in Jesus' death and resurrection on our behalf. The meal serves as a reaffirmation of our faith.

### **b) Bible resources**

The key passages which deal with the Lord's supper are found in the description of the meal in the three synoptic gospels, Mark 14:22-, Matt 26:26- and Luke 22:19-, and in the apostle Paul's teaching on the supper in his letter to the Corinthians (1 Cor 10. 16; 11:23-26).

### **c) Historical survey**

Fifteen hundred years before the birth of Christ the Hebrew people (Jews, Israel) were slaves in Egypt. The tenth plague was about to fall on Egypt. The Hebrews were to protect themselves from the plague and to prepare for their escape. On that evening each family killed a young lamb and painted their door posts with its blood. The lamb was then cooked along with unleavened bread (i.e. bread prepared quickly - there was no time to wait for it to rise). That night the angel of death passed over Egypt; where there was no blood the first born in the family died. The people ate their meal and

early the next morning was led out of bondage. (Pharaoh was beaten by the plagues and so sent them packing. He later changed his mind.) So God, with a mighty and outstretched arm, rescued His people, led them safely through the Red Sea into the wilderness to meet with Him.

The remembrance of this great act of God was celebrated by each family in the Passover Feast. The meal would consist of a cooked lamb (later other meats were included) and unleavened bread (wine was also later included). The head of the family would recount the great events of the Passover and Exodus, i.e. how the blood of the lamb had saved them from the Angel of Death and how they had been rescued from bondage by their God.

Jesus, on the Thursday night, the night of his arrest, had joined with his disciples to celebrate the salvation event of the Exodus. Yet now he changed the focus of the meal. No longer would his disciples remember the Exodus from Egypt. They would now remember the "Exodus" from Jerusalem (Luke 9:31, "departure" = exodus in the Greek). They would remember the cross and the empty tomb. He also changed the symbols from bread and meat to bread and wine.

So Jesus passed around the bread saying, "Take eat, this is my body", and the wine, saying, "Drink of it, all of you, for this is my blood of the new agreement [covenant] which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins<sup>1</sup>" these are symbols of my body and blood given for you.

#### **d) An act of remembrance**

The Lord's Supper is primarily an act of remembrance. "Do this in remembrance of me" said Jesus (1Cor.11:22). In this act of remembrance we concentrate on the death of Christ. "For as often as you eat this bread and drink this cup you proclaim (set forth) the Lord's death until he comes" (1Cor.11:26).

In the institution of the Lord's Supper, Jesus subsumed the Jewish Passover meal to create a new remembrance meal. The Passover meal was designed to focus attention of God's great salvation event in the Exodus (Ex 12:21-27). By participating in the

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<sup>1</sup> These familiar words have a history in the OT (Exodus 24.8; Jer 31.31-33). When our Lord says these words to the disciples, he is making that new covenant with them as representatives of New Israel.

meal, with its symbolic meaning, the Israelites proclaimed (set forth) the great act of God's Passover. In the Lord's Supper our act of remembrance focuses on Jesus' death and what it achieved. Jesus' death established the new covenant (agreement) between God and mankind. It was the means of restoring our relationship with God. Now God could say "you are my people and I am your God." So when Jesus instituted the communion he said, "this is my blood of the new covenant which is poured out for many" "for the forgiveness of sins."

The establishment of the covenant between God and man, through Christ's death on the cross, is prefigured in the Old Testament in Exodus 19-24. "You have seen what I did to the Egyptians and how I bore you on eagles' wings and brought you to myself. Now therefore if you will obey my voice and keep my covenant, (the response to God's offer) you shall be my possession among all peoples; for all the earth is mine, and you shall be to me a Kingdom of priests and a holy nation" (the promise), Ex.19:4ff. After relating the covenant law, Ex.20-23, the people respond. "All the words which the Lord has spoken we will do." Moses then "built an altar." The people "offered burnt offerings and sacrifices" and Moses took half the blood and put it in basins." He then read the law and the people responded. "All that the Lord has spoken we will do and we will be obedient" and Moses took the blood and threw it upon the people and said, "behold the blood of the covenant which the Lord has made with you in accordance with all these words."

So the Lord's Supper is primarily a symbolic act of remembrance. It serves to recall that Christ has shed his blood as a sacrifice for the forgiveness of sins and that this has enabled the establishment of the new covenant (or agreement) between God and mankind. The central promise of the new covenant is life (Jn.3:16) and our response is faith/belief (Jn.6:28-29).

#### **e) The essence of the Holy Communion**

In the Lord's Supper there is a primary response of faith toward Jesus Christ as we participate in the meal and this primary response stimulates a group of secondary responses:

### **i) The primary response: faith in Christ**

In the Lord's Supper, as we remember Jesus' death on our behalf our primary response is that of faith. Our eating is a way of saying "I really believe Lord that you gave your life that I might live." Our drinking is a way of saying, "I really believe Lord you shed your blood for my sins." The Lord's Supper is a physical expression of a reaffirmation of faith by the members of the Christian community (church).

This insight comes from John 6 where the idea of eating Christ's body and drinking his blood is explained. Jesus states that "if any man eats of this bread he will live for ever and the bread which I give for the life of the world is my flesh" (6:51). "He who eats my flesh and drinks my blood has eternal life" (6:54). The mystery is explained in Jesus' words "Do not labour for the food which perishes, but for the food which endures to eternal life.... the work of God is (i.e. the labour required of us by God), to believe in the one he has sent," 6:27-29. Eating and drinking of Christ's body and blood simply means believing in his sacrificial death on our behalf, 6:53.

The idea of a release of life by participating in flesh and blood comes from the Old Testament, Lev.17:11. Christ's violent blood-letting has made atonement (paid the penalty) for our rebellion and secured eternal life for all who believe, Jn.3:15.

As God fed the children of Israel in the desert with the miraculous manna from heaven, so Christ feeds with a miraculous life-giving food. Not loaves and fishes, but rather his sacrificial death on our behalf. Eating Christ's body and drinking his blood simply means believing on the crucified Son of God who gave his life as a ransom for many ("poured out his life for the forgiveness of sins").

In simple terms, eating and drinking serves as a physical expression of believing.

### **ii) The secondary responses**

As we join in this meal and centre our minds on the great fact that Jesus has died for us to give us life everlasting and release us from the power of sin, we are stimulated to respond in four ways. These are the secondary responses, although certainly not second-rate.

*a) Praise and thanksgiving*

A natural response to what Jesus has done for us. The Holy Communion is often called the "eucharist". This word derives from the Greek word for thanksgiving.

*b) Fellowship*

The meal was always to be a family/church activity. As the group joins in the meal they are faced with a tremendous truth. Each person in the group is a new person in Christ. No longer are they slaves of sin, no longer do they face the blackness of a death without God. Each person is bound together by a profound truth, a truth that unites them. Jesus has died for us. When we realise this, we can't help but be drawn nearer to each other. The common meal symbolizes our common sharing in Christ through faith. "Because there is one loaf (Christ) we who are many are one body, for we all participate in the one loaf", (i.e. exercise faith in Christ), cf. John 6:56. Observe how distressed Paul the apostle is when the church in Corinth allows the unity of the Lord's Supper to be affected, 1Cor.11:17-33. The Lord's Supper expresses our common bond forged by our common faith in Christ, and for this reason we often call it "communion".

*c) Hope*

Jesus said, "I will not drink again of this fruit of the vine until that day when I drink it new with you in my Father's Kingdom, Matt.26:29. As we join in the meal we are reminded of the great feast with the Father in heaven and so we look forward with hope to that day when we shall all be together.

*d) Commitment*

Jesus said, "This is my blood of the new agreement." The new agreement is, that through Jesus' death for us, God is our God and we are his children. To be one of his children means to be a disciple of Jesus, to follow in Jesus' footsteps. Jesus has given his life that we might live and so we must strive to realize that life we now possess in him.

### 3. Notes

The Holy Communion can either follow a conservative "translation" of the 1662 service which follows closely Archbishop Cranmer's 1552 service, or the now commonly used modern service of Holy Communion which i] restores the "catholic" form of the Great Thanksgiving and ii] incorporates elements of Morning Prayer. Both forms have their value, eg., the conservative "translation" is very useful in Lent.

The service has two basic sections:

**1] The liturgy of the Word.** In this section the focus is on the present rule of Christ through the Scriptures.

**2] The liturgy of the Sacrament.** In this section the focus is on the past work of Christ, his sacrificial work on the cross. Our eating of the bread and drinking of the wine symbolises our believing in Christ's sacrifice for us. The life-giving results of Christ's death and resurrection are applied to us in the present as we remember and believe in what Jesus has done for us.

Between these two sections the table is prepared and the offertory collected. This is probably the most practical moment to perform both acts, but it is important to stress that there is no sacramental link between the two. All that is taking place is that the gifts toward ministry are collected and the table prepared for the fellowship meal.

The movement [in our service] is from the penitential (recognition of sin and unworthiness, a call for mercy and the offer of forgiveness), to the reflective (focus on the Scriptures), to thanksgiving and praise. It is a simple service of worship which enables us to meet with our risen Lord who has promised to be with us when we gather. We hear him through the Scriptures, confess him, pray to him, repent, thank and praise him. Above all we remember and believe.

#### **The Liturgy**

**The Greeting.** Priest. Said firmly and with warmth.

**The Sentence.** Read by the Deacon/Minister. The sentence and prayer establishes the theme of the service. Found in "The Collects and Readings for the Holy Communion".

**The Prayer of Preparation.** The collect for purity - a request for purity of worship. Led by the Deacon/Minister. Introduced by "Let us pray".

**The Commandments,** either [The Ten Commandments] or the Two Great Commandments. Read by the Priest/Lay Reader. Although rightly a declaration of the Covenant, the Commandments are best seen as a reminder that "our righteousness is but filthy rags". We are slaves to sin. In the more modern orders this "Cranmer" tradition is no longer followed.

**Response** - Kyrie Eleison - is an address to the persons of the Trinity. It expresses unworthiness of approach. It's origin is Greek.

**The Confession** - optional position. Introduced by the Deacon/Priest and led by the Deacon/Minister after a pause for self examination. There were two confessions in the Mediaeval mass. Cranmer dropped this first one which was said by the Priest alone. The Lutherans dropped the second. Modern orders retains it as an alternate in the 2nd Order. It best fits following the Commandments (Reformed). The Priest then pronounces the Absolution.

**The Gloria in Excelsis.** An ancient hymn sung as a joyful shout of praise.

**Collect.** Prayed by the Priest. Standing or kneeling.

**Old Testament reading.** Read by a member of the congregation.

**Psalms.** Led by the Deacon/Minister/Lay Reader. Said (or Sung) together seated with the appointed verse said before and after.

**Epistle.** Read by a member of the congregation.

**Gradual Hymn or Anthem.**

**The Gospel reading.** Read by the Deacon. Responses said, congregation standing. Standing for the Gospel does not imply that the gospels are more inspired than the rest of scripture, rather that the words of Jesus are the centre of God's revelation to mankind. Responses are used before and after and the gospel is often introduced with a gospel acclamation which is seasonal in nature

**Sermon.**

**Nicene Creed.** Led by the Deacon/Minister, all standing. The creed is not an essential part of the service. [?] It came in as a result of the doctrinal arguments of the 4th century. [However,] it fits well as a response of allegiance to the truths of scripture following on from the Bible readings and sermon.

**Intercession.** Usually led by the Priest in the midst of the congregation or from the Prayer Desk. Flexibility may be used at this point. Alternate forms may be used.

Here we wrestle and overcome the powers of darkness. The walls of Jericho come crashing down. The Lord's Prayer may be used here, or immediately before or after the communion.

**Sentences.** Deacon/Minister. Selection is important as some lead naturally into the confession. They reflect the "comfortable words" of BCP.

**The prayer of Humble Access.** Led by the Deacon/Minister. This beautiful prayer by Cranmer was designed to be said just before all took the communion. In that sense it is a kind of prayer of preparation as we unworthily feed on Christ by faith. It does not quite fit in this position, but most would not like to lose it, so we use it to prepare us for the Great Thanksgiving. Scriptural base, Luke.16:31 and Mark.7:28.

**The Greeting of Peace.** The greeting is given by the Priest. [Personal greetings to those in close proximity may follow although this practice is increasingly disturbing the "transcendent" nature of the service.]

**Offertory Hymn.** Deacon/Minister. The elements are received from members of the congregation (if this is the tradition of the church) and the table is prepared by the Priest/Deacon/Servers. The Credence table is used to allocate the bread and wine required and these elements are then placed on the Communion table.

**The gifts of the people are received.** The offertory prayer is given by the Priest.

**The Great Thanksgiving.** The Priest now stands at the Holy Table in a Northern position (Low church) or East or West (High church). At the last supper, when Jesus and the disciples gathered together, they most probably gathered together for the Passover. When Jesus gave thanks at the meal he would have recited the Jewish liturgical berakah, or prayer of adoration, blessing God. This liturgy has four parts; an invitation, a statement of motives which are given by rehearsing the great deeds of God on behalf of his people, prayer, and a doxology. These four elements are contained in the modern (2nd Order) thanksgivings.

The Sursum Corda (including the greeting). May be sung as a canon, standing.

"Let us pray" is often added and gives a cue if the congregation is to kneel.

Then follows the recounting of God's great deeds concluding with the Sanctus in which we are privileged to share in the praise of the Heavenly host. The Benedictus is an optional anthem, but often not used in Evangelical circles. It must be stressed that recounting Math.21:9 has nothing to do with the Spirit's coming upon the elements of bread and wine to somehow change them into the body and blood of Christ.

Anglicans uphold the Protestant view that the bread and wine always remain bread

and wine. It simply reminds us of the Passion of Christ through which he comes to reign over us.

The institution of the Last Supper. A more explicit statement of motives. The bread and wine are raised by the Priest at this point to indicate their setting apart for a special use - symbols of Jesus' life given that we may live.

The acclamation is followed by the Anamnesis - a statement of belief that the bread and wine serve as symbols of Jesus perfect sacrifice upon the cross, and do so until his coming again.

The Epiiclesis, or Petition for the congregation - "Renew us by ....."

The Doxology. A trinitarian praise taken from the song of the angels who stand before the throne of God, Rev.7:11-12.

**The Communion.** The Priest breaks the bread before the people and leads the responsory, 1Cor.10:17. We are united through the sacrifice of Christ for us.

**The Agnus Dei** may be sung here as an optional Anthem. It serves as a meditation upon the broken bread - Christ's sacrifice for us.

**The Invitation** calls the congregation forward to take the communion and also allows them to hear the full words of distribution along the lines of BCP.

**Distribution.** There are numerous words of distribution in Prayer Book revision. An Australian Prayer Book has three. For example, looking at the words for the bread:

1. "The body of our Lord Jesus Christ, which was given for you, preserve your body and soul to everlasting life; take and eat this in remembrance that Christ died for you, and feed on him in your heart by faith with thanksgiving". This option follows Cranmer who followed Calvin. Here it is implied that if we eat, believing in the memory of Christ's death on our behalf, his body broken, his blood shed, then we do actually feed on Christ, although it is a heavenly feeding.
2. "The body of Christ keep you in eternal life." This option is more Lutheran/Catholic. It can imply that the bread and wine become the body and blood of Christ to the true believer. It implies that the words said over the bread and wine have made them the body and blood of Christ. This is the doctrine of transubstantiation, rejected at the Reformation.
3. "Take and eat this in remembrance that Christ died for you and be thankful." These words are in line with the teachings of Zwingli who said that in eating and drinking we are simply using the elements to remind us of Christ's death on our behalf. As we eat, we remember, as we remember, we believe. Eating is believing. Cf John 6. Evangelicals tend to use these words

of distribution although they do not reflect Cranmer's view.

**Sentence.** The concluding section of the service begins with a sentence of scripture to sum up the theme of the Word element of the service. Said by the Deacon/Minister.

**Prayer of Thanksgiving.** A shortened form of Cranmer's prayer in the BCP works well.

**A concluding prayer of thankfulness.** We commit ourselves to dedicate our lives to Christ in the power of the Holy Spirit. Notices may follow.

**Dismissal Hymn.**

**The Blessing with seasonal additions.** Said by the Priest. It is a prayer that we be at peace, be at rest, with God. The greatest of all blessings is that we stand in an eternal relationship with our God and creator.

The Dismissal is led by the Deacon/Minister.

### **Vestments**

In Low Anglican the priest wears Cassock, Surplice and Scarf. In Middle church the Scarf is replaced by a Stole (coloured to the season), and in High Church the dress is Alb (a white linen Cassock-like vestment), Stole and Chasuble. The Amice, a linen piece under the Alb representing a breastplate, and the Maniple, a miniature Stole worn on the left forearm, is usually only worn in High Anglo-catholic churches.

### **Holy Table ornaments linen...**

**Cross.** In Low Church it is not placed on the table. In High Church it is often a Crucifix.

**Altar Lights.** If used, usually two signifying that Christ is the light of the world.

**A Book Desk,** or sometimes a cushion, used to support the Prayer Book for the celebrant.

**A Fair Linen Cloth.** White linen covering the Holy Table and hanging down at the ends. It is often embroidered with five crosses signifying Christ's five wounds. In a High tradition it represents Christ's burial cloth, but in a Low tradition it is a table covering for a meal.

**The Corporal.** A square of linen upon which the vessels are placed.

**The Pall.** A square of supported linen placed over the Chalice.

**Purificators** for wiping the Chalice.

**The Burse.** Two hinged squares in the colour of the season placed on the Paten/Chalice and used to hold extra Purificators.

**The Chalice Veil.** A square of embroidered silk in the colours of the season placed over the Chalice, Paten etc.

The Chalice

Paten. To hold the consecrated bread.

**Credence Table** (South side of sanctuary)

Pix. A container for the bread. In Low Church the bread is actually bread, but in High church it is usually unleavened wafers.

Cruets. A container for the wine, and one for water where intincturing (a mixed chalice) is practiced.

Lavabo Basin. For hand washing

Alms Dish. For the collection.

**4. Discussion**

How would you describe the situation where a person joined in the Lord's Supper, but did not believe in the truth it conveys?

As you think back over your Anglican (or non-Anglican) journey of faith, can you identify the impact that various types of churchmanship at both a church level and a priest-level have had on your own practice? Comment on these impacts and how they have affected or did affect your behaviour.