

# Commentated Eucharist

Here are the scripts written to explain elements of the Eucharistic Liturgy – offered as a commentary to services of August 15 and 22 2015.

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Welcome to this service of worship. It will be different from our usual service in that interspersed with the words of the service there will be explanation in what is called a 'commentated eucharist.' First, a note about terminology.

**Eucharist** is from the Greek meaning thanksgiving, and thus emphasises when people come together to worship it is a thanksgiving to God for all God's blessings and especially a thanksgiving and memorial of Christ's death and resurrection. Another word used is '**Liturgy**', again from the Greek meaning 'work of the people'. That is, not only does the leader have a part, all present are invited to join in. Thus the liturgy we follow each Sunday has a set of symbols and words and actions that help us to do our work. We pray, we listen to God's word, we confess, we make peace, we lift up our hearts, we hold out our hands we are fed, we give thanks. Then, loved and strengthened we go out to 'love and serve' as God's people in the world. In the Anglican Church we have traditionally called the service where bread and wine is used **Holy Communion**, that is, holy communion between God and God's people. This terminology is less used today. While we still acknowledge that it is 'holy communion', it is that and more.

One further aspect before we begin worship. Usually two persons lead, the first being the worship leader usually a layperson, often called the liturgical assistant. The ordained minister pronounces forgiveness and leads the part including the bread and wine, the 'ministry of the sacrament'. This person is the President of the Eucharist, that is, the one who presides over the whole celebration.

At the 10.30 service, we first pause for a moment of silence before our service begins. We are encouraged to be still...aware of God's presence with us...God who is with us, within us, between us, beyond us.....

The choir and liturgical assistants then process to the singing of a hymn.

Alternatively, at our 8am service there is an informal welcome to the worship and the page number is given as there are several options in the New Zealand Prayer Book, also called in Maori, 'He karakia mihinare o Aotearoa'.

## The Ministry of Word and Prayer

First is the sub-section: '**The Gathering of the Community**'. This includes the greeting and acknowledging God's presence in the worship. The theme of the service may be announced through the reading of a verse from Scripture.

Then follows what has been known as the Collect for purity. Here we are mindful of making ourselves open to God's presence. This is followed by the Gloria, said or sung.

The Gloria goes back to Jewish worship wherein God was praised as the people came together in worship, often saying or singing a psalm. It is an ancient hymn of the church being used since the 4<sup>th</sup> century. In contemporary liturgies sometimes another hymn or song of praise is included at this point.

Now we move to a new section, **the penitential part**, where we acknowledge we have not lived the life to which Jesus called us, and especially that we have failed to keep the commandment of love. At this point the new commandment, the two greatest commandments or the ten commandments are read.

This may be followed by the kyrie or 'Lord have mercy', an ancient prayer of penitence as people came before the Lord. We are particularly reminded of this in the more penitential season of Lent.

Some words of scripture are also presented reminding us that when we acknowledge our shortcomings to God, God is loving and will forgive us as we pray in sincerity. There is a time when we can keep silence to call to mind our sins. Then a prayer of *confession* is provided. It is said corporately, that is using the pronoun 'we' rather than 'I'. This implies that as member of the congregation each of us will have considered prayerfully our own failings on the evening or morning before the service– so that we are able to confess sincerely within the service the wrongs we have done.

Following the prayer is the *absolution*, that is, the forgiveness that God offers. This is given by the Presiding Priest and especially refers back to Jesus' giving authority to Peter after the resurrection: 'If you forgive the sins of any they are forgiven.' Likewise from the letter of John: 'If we confess our sins, Christ who is faithful and just will forgive our sins and cleanse us from all unrighteousness. We are mindful also from one of the liturgies 'God forgives you, forgive others, forgive yourself.' Thus we can have a peace about what is past.

### **Ministry of the Word – The Proclamation**

As we move to a new section there may be a *responsory* greeting. This links us from the preceding section into the next where we focus on the word of God. A *scripture sentence* gives the intention of the theme. This and the prayer which follows are printed in Newslink. At some point there is also opportunity for the children to have their learning time. They leave with a prayer and take a Bible, symbolising their learning from the written word of God.

After the sentence is the *Collect* or prayer of the day. The origin of the word collect was that it 'collected' the theme of the day and incorporates it into a prayer.

The *Readings* from the Bible follow. When families and friends gather together to eat, they often sit down first to chat, to exchange news and views, and to share memories and family history. This is what we do now in the readings that follow. The readings are taken from the *Lectionary*, the Church's selection of Bible passages according to theme or working through books of the Bible. We cover the vast majority of the Bible over a period of three years. The advantage of a lectionary is that it ensures we get to hear the whole of the Bible, not just parts of the Bible that preachers particularly like. At St James there are either 2 or 3 readings. Where there are 2 the reading is read which most links with the gospel.

*The Old Testament Lesson* is from the Hebrew Bible, parts of the scripture we share with our Jewish brothers and sisters. These reflect the faith and prayers and thoughts and deeds of those who lived before Jesus' birth. At the end of the readings, as we have listened to what God is saying, we respond 'thanks be to God.'

Where the service has sung components, a *psalm* usually follows. This links with the preceding reading and would have been part of the Jewish liturgy. (When we sing the Psalm it is set to an Anglican psalm chant. A chant can be fitted to any psalm by a system of symbols, which is called 'pointing'. The symbols that look like apostrophes or dots in the middle of the line help you to know when the notes of the psalm change.

Then follows the *New Testament Lesson*. It is sometimes called the 'epistle' which means letter, as many of the New Testament books are letters written by leaders of the early church.

In the sung service the '*Gradual*' hymn follows. 'Gradual' is from the Latin meaning step. This hymn was traditionally sung while the Bible was processed into the midst of the people for the reading of the *Gospel* passage.

Then follows the *Gospel* reading, which contains 'good news' about Jesus or his teaching. We honour its importance by standing when it is read.

The *Sermon* follows. This had its beginnings in the synagogue where the reading was followed by explanation and commentary. A dramatic account of this occurred in the synagogue at the start of Jesus' earthly ministry and he identified himself as the one referred to in Isaiah 61: 'The Spirit of the Lord is upon me....' The preacher usually begins with a brief prayer asking that God will speak inwardly in people as they listen to what is said. It is a proclamation of God's teaching and affirming God's love for us. A time of silence is kept for people to reflect on what has been spoken.

*An Affirmation of faith* is now said together. The most common way of saying this is in a Creed (from the Latin word *credo* 'I believe'....) It is based on Scripture and serves three purposes.

1. We are reminded of the faith and teaching of the church through the ages.
2. By reciting the creed we recommit our lives to God.
3. The Creed is a further form of praise.

The last section of the Ministry of Word is the **Prayers of the People**. These include intercessions or prayers for others and ourselves, and thanksgivings. They are usually offered by a lay worship leader or congregation members and express the concerns of the people as well as offering collective thanksgiving. To intercede on behalf of the people of God is a great privilege and responsibility and the pray-ers prayerfully prepare. A general format is usually followed, for the universal and the local church, the world and our nation, the local community and the community of heaven, those in need, and our own needs. It is a requirement of the liturgy of the Eucharist that the Lord' Prayer be prayed at least once. In sung services this is often set to music and either rounds off the prayers of the people or is located just before the administration of communion.

## **The Ministry of the Sacrament**

In our Anglican tradition a Priest presides at the liturgy of the Eucharist, but celebrating the Eucharist is something we all do together. It is our joy, our privilege and one of the ways we serve, to enter together into the work of worshipping God through our Eucharistic services. In this part of the service we participate in the sacrament of Holy Communion.

**The Peace:** Jesus came to bring us peace with God and peace with others. In the Hebrew language the word for peace, *shalom*, means not just quiet or an absence of war, but also the fullness of personal wholeness and harmony with God and others. Exchanging the peace reminds us that we need to have good relationships with others as well as with God if we are to live and worship in the way that God wants us to. God invites us to his banquet in this service, but in order to share it in a way that is pleasing to God, we need to put things right and be in harmony with one another.

The Peace also signals the shift as we move from the *first* part of the service – the ministry of word and prayer – to the *second* part – the ministry of the sacrament.

A sacrament is an action that gives expression to a good gift of God. The sacrament of Holy Communion involves actions, symbols and words to express Christ's gift of his life to his followers. There is always an element of mystery in a sacrament because it expresses the gift of God's own self to us. By participating in the sacrament of Holy Communion with faith, we experience the gift that God wants to give us.

## **The Celebration of the Eucharist**

**The Preparation of the Gifts:** While we sing a hymn, the table will be set for the holy meal that Jesus spreads for us. At the same time, our offerings of bread and wine, money for God's work through our church, and food for the local foodbank are presented and dedicated to God's service.

On the Holy Table, we have set cups called chalices and plates called patens. The ancient names for these vessels, which come originally from the Greek language, and then through Latin and French into English, remind us that the liturgical tradition we are sharing in the Eucharist comes from the earliest days of Christianity, almost 2,000 years ago, and has been handed down to us by Christians through the ages as a priceless treasure of our faith.

The chalices and patens contain the wine and the bread for this special meal, which we share together in remembrance of Jesus. At his Last Supper with his disciples before he died, Jesus commanded them, and all Christians who followed them, to have this meal so that we would always remember who he was and what he said and did for us. This commandment has important effects in the lives of Jesus's followers. It means that whenever we want to remember him according to this command, we need to get together with other followers of his to have the meal. Or, to put the same thing the other way around, whenever we get together to have the meal, we remember Jesus, our Saviour! Also, as we are present at this meal and re-enact Jesus's last supper in the liturgy and the food we share, Jesus is present to us in a deep and real and nourishing way, giving us energy for our life of loving faith and service.

## **The Great Thanksgiving**

Now a prayer of thanksgiving is said over the bread and wine. Think of this as the Grace that many people say at the dinner table before they sit down to eat. The difference is that in this prayer we give thanks to God not only for this very special food, but also for everything that God has done for us from Creation until now. The word for "thanksgiving" in Greek is Eucharist, and this Great Thanksgiving Prayer is the very heart of the Eucharistic liturgy.

During this prayer, those of us who are able to do so are encouraged all to stand together, sharing the same stance as the presiding Priest as a sign that we are celebrating the Eucharist together around the table of the Lord.

## **The Communion**

As the family of God, we are now invited to pray together the Christian family prayer which Jesus himself taught us, praying to God as our Father. In Aotearoa/New Zealand we have two treaty languages, Maori and English, and we honour our bicultural partnership in this land by singing the Lord's Prayer quite often in Maori. Of course, our commitment to the bicultural journey needs to go way beyond this, as we grow in our use of Maori and of other languages to express the inclusiveness of God and of God's Church.

## **The Invitation**

Now we are invited to Communion, and we will receive the bread and the wine. It's important to realise that this Bread and Wine are very special and holy. At his Last Supper with his disciples Jesus said something quite unusual about them. He called the bread his body and the wine his blood. Jesus was telling his disciples that he was giving his life as a gift, so that they and all of us could be friends of God. He was doing this to show how much he loved us, because giving up your life for someone is the greatest example of showing love. And Jesus was also telling them that they would experience his life and strength in this special meal. When you receive Communion, hold your hands out with one hand over the other in the shape of a cross, to remember that Christ died for you. You will hear the words "The Body of Christ" and "The Blood of Christ". And you are invited to say, "Amen", as a way of saying, "Yes, I want Jesus' life and strength in me." All who love Jesus and want to have his life in them are welcome to receive this holy meal. It doesn't matter what their age is or which church they come from. This is for all who belong to God's family.

## **Prayer after Communion**

Once the Communion is over, the service ends quite quickly. First, we pray, thanking God for giving us such gracious hospitality, and recognising that we have been fed for a *reason* – to strengthen us for God's service. The presiding Priest gives us God's blessing and after that a final hymn is sung and the service leaders move to the back of the church for the dismissal.

## **The Dismissal**

The last words of the service are the dismissal, which give us our job description. We are sent forth by the worship leader to love and serve the Lord.

The dismissal changes our direction. We turn away from the sanctuary and we face an open door. At first it looks to us like the door out of the church, but as we walk through it we discover that it is the door into the world, where Christ can still be found and followed.

[The text has been prepared by Peter Benge, Jean Malcolm and Derek Lightbourne and is based on a Text by the Ven. Peter Hannen; Diocese of Montreal <http://montreal.anglican.org/resources/chldeuch.shtml>]