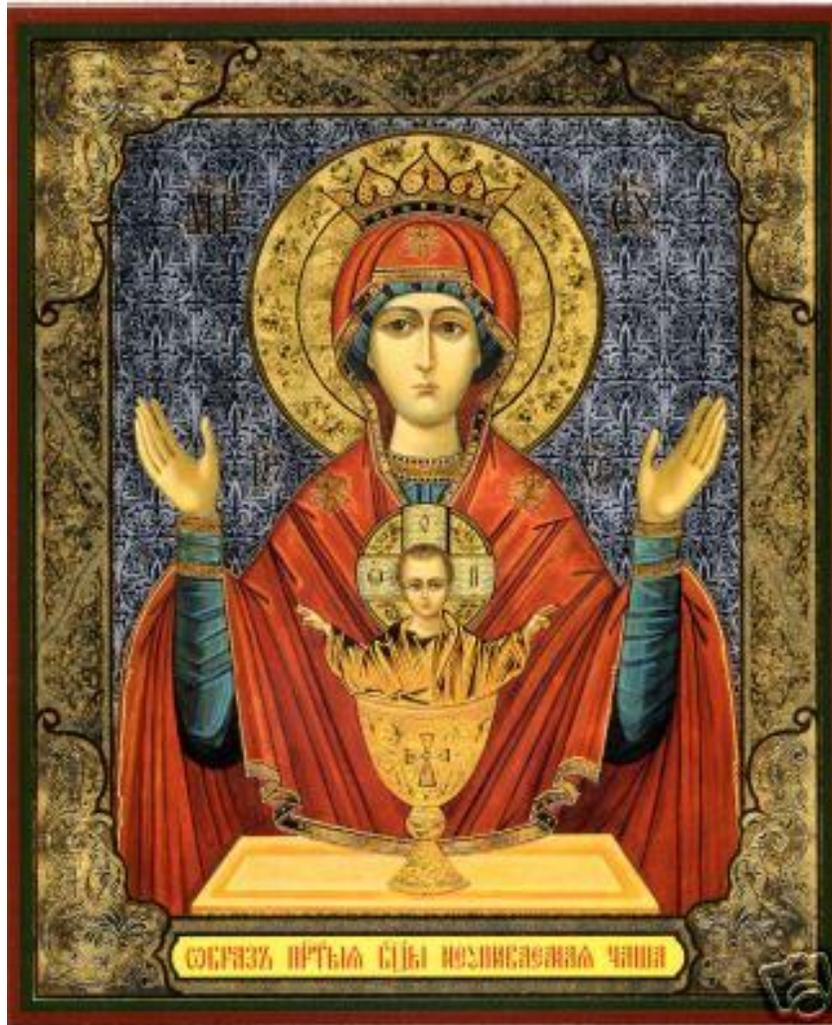


# *The Holy Eucharist*



## *A Guide to Your Practice*

by

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## *Introduction*

The Gospel tells us plainly: We need to live what we proclaim. All of us need to live in spiritual disciplines that ground us in our tradition ~

- Weekly Practice (Eucharist)
- Daily Practice (Praying the Office: e.g., Morning Prayer)
- Regular self-reflection that connects us to community and our service to others

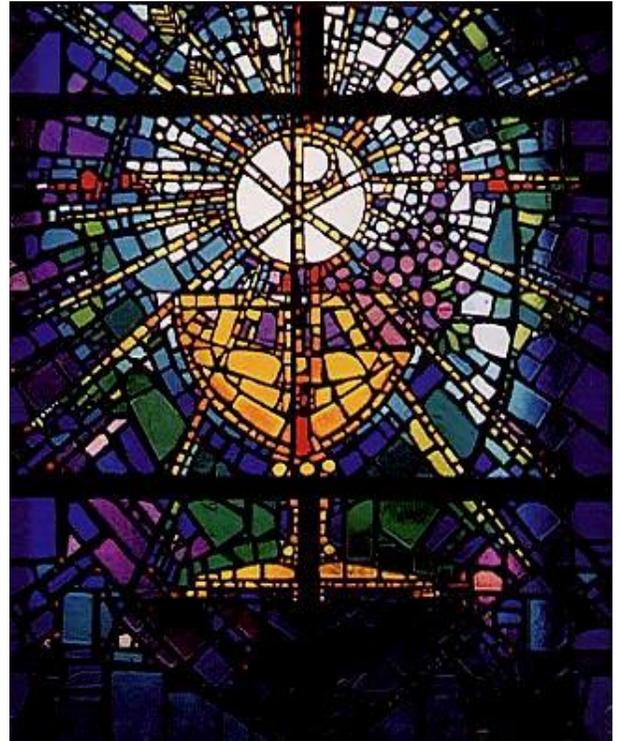
Such practice roots us in the foundations of our baptismal identity and purpose and forms us so we can make sense of the patterns and demands of our lives.

This booklet is a guide to our weekly practice of Eucharist. It will help the practitioner live more fully into the pattern and rhythm of the Sunday Eucharist.



## *What is Holy Eucharist?*

The Holy Eucharist is the "principal act of Christian worship on the Lord's Day" (BCP p. 13). But why is this so? Jesus began the practice and told us to continue to do this in remembrance of him. During various periods of the Church's life, however, it has received less emphasis, primarily when there was a shortage of priests. After the Reformation, Holy Communion has been understood as having a secondary or lesser role by Protestant denominations that chose to focus on only the first half of the Eucharist - *the Liturgy of the Word*. The Protestant Reformation's claim was one of "Sola Scriptura" or "Scripture alone." But this can be seen as more of a reaction against the ecclesiastical abuses of the Holy Eucharist that helped fuel the Reformation. None of the great reformers desired to repudiate the Eucharist as the "principal act of Christian worship on the Lord's Day." Calvin even instructed that it be *the* service for the Lord's Day at all the reformation churches (Institutes IV. 17. 43.).



Eucharist means "thanksgiving." So the Holy Eucharist is a communal act of offering God thanksgiving. The Eucharist isn't an experience. It's an action. The Eucharist involves coming together to do something, not to get something. We come to offer something to God. What we offer is, as we say in the Eucharist, our lives as "a sacrifice of praise and thanksgiving." The Eucharist takes us beyond mere fellowship to a corporate work of praise and thanksgiving. Fellowship and community aren't the goal of the Eucharist. They are the byproducts. Community comes as a faithful result of the Eucharist as it occurs in the lives of the gathered Body of Christ. The Eucharist is a response to something God has already done.

It's an act that's been handed down over the centuries by the Church as a faithful response to God's redeeming work.

Our Catechism states (BCP p. 859): "The Holy Eucharist is the sacrament commanded by Christ for the continual remembrance of his life, death, and resurrection, until his coming again." It is a sacrifice because it is the "Church's sacrifice of praise and thanksgiving," and it "is the way by which the sacrifice of Christ is made present and in which he unites us to his one offering of himself."

Since a sacrament is an outward and visible sign of an inward and spiritual grace, how does this relate to the Eucharist? "The outward and visible sign is the bread and wine, given and received according to Christ's command" and "the inward and spiritual grace is the Body and Blood of Christ given to his people, and received by faith."



***The Eucharist is the whole liturgy, not just the communion***

It is important to remember this. The whole service consecrates, not just the words at communion.

The Eucharist has two principal parts: ***The Liturgy of the Word*** and the ***Liturgy of the Holy Communion***, also known as the *proanaphora* and the *anaphora*. *Anaphora* literally means *offering*, because the Eucharist, in its central essence, is an offering of praise and thanksgiving to God. This form of the Liturgy of the Word and the Liturgy of the Holy Communion is what the Eucharist has been about since the early Church.



Already by the 2nd C. the form of the Sunday service was that with which we're familiar: scripture readings, sermon, prayers, preparation, thanksgiving, communion. When this service moved from the homes of people to a church building, it was necessary to add entrance rites and dismissal rites to get people in and out.

## *The Liturgy of the Word*

*The Entrance Rite* has three parts: *The Opening Acclamation*, *the Collect for Purity*, and *a Hymn of Praise*. They are designed to bring us together in common focus on God. They are clear statements as to why we are here in worship.

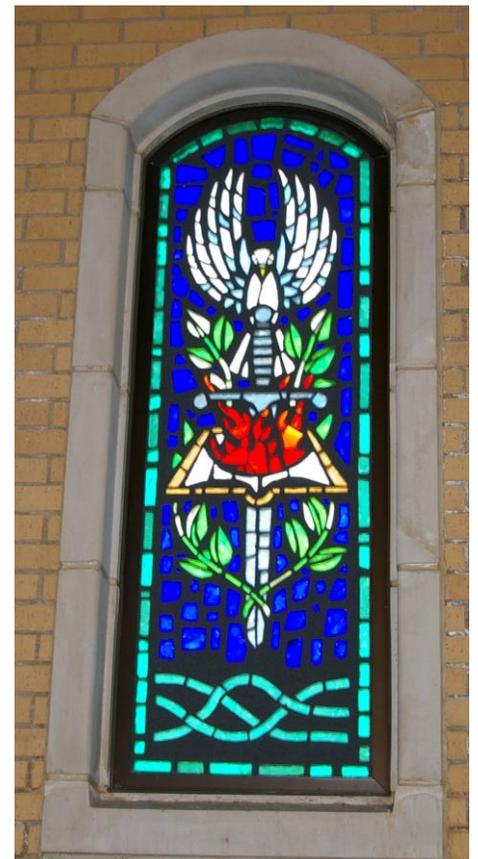
*The Opening Acclamation* varies with the season. The Trinitarian acclamation is used for all seasons except Lent and Easter. There are particular acclamations for those two seasons.



*The Collect for Purity* is based on Psalm 51, and it sums up or "collects" the elements that make for truthful worship. It asks God to cleanse us so we can offer truthful worship. It frames us so God can form us through the Eucharist.

A *Hymn of Praise* is here because it tells us that we come together to do that one thing. Worship is an act of praise. The *Gloria* is an ancient hymn that echoes the words of the angels at our Lord's birth. The *Kyrie* is comparable to the Hebrew shout of "hosanna," meaning "save us." It is not an act of begging, but rather a joyful affirmation that one of God's essential qualities is to have mercy. The *Trisagion* ("Thrice Holy") comes to our liturgy through the ancient liturgies of the Eastern Orthodox Church.

*The Propers of the Day* are those readings from the Scriptures and the *Collect* specifically assigned for a given Sunday or Holy Day.



- The *Collect of the Day*, like the *Collect for Purity*, is designed to "collect" the theme of the readings into a prayer that sets the tone for that day's worship.
- The *Lesson* is usually from the Old Testament, also called the Hebrew Scriptures, except during the Easter season when it is from the Acts of the Apostles.
- The *Epistle* follows. It is a reading from one of the epistles or letters of the New Testament.
- We stand for the reading or the *Gospel*, which literally means *Good News* - specifically the Good News of Jesus. It is a reading from one of the four Gospel accounts.
- All these lessons are on a 3-year cycle or Lectionary. We follow a 3-year cycle of readings; Year A - Matthew; Year B - Mark; Year C - Luke; with selections from John scattered throughout each cycle.

Following the *Propers of the Day*, we have the response to God's Word proclaimed in the form of the *Sermon, Nicene Creed, Prayers, Confession, and the Peace*. This five-fold response comes because of the proclamation of God's Word.

- *The Sermon* should aid us in understanding the Word of God and should be connected to the Scriptures proclaimed earlier.
- *The Creed* calls us to affirm the Word of God given us in the Scriptures.
- *The Prayers* are specific responses to what the Word of God calls us to be and do.

- *The Confession* followed by the *Absolution* responds to the nature of the Word of God as we recognize that we have fallen short of who we have been called to be and what we have been called to do.
- In *the Peace*, the people gathered get in right relationship with one another. *The Peace* lets us know that what we have just done is pleasing to God, and it sets us in the proper spiritual and communal framework to approach the altar for the sacrament.

This five-fold response forms a narrative arc in the Liturgy of the Word at the Holy Eucharist. At the center of the Liturgy of the Word is the Gospel. All we do in our liturgy after the Gospel is proclaimed shapes our response to that Good News in our lives.



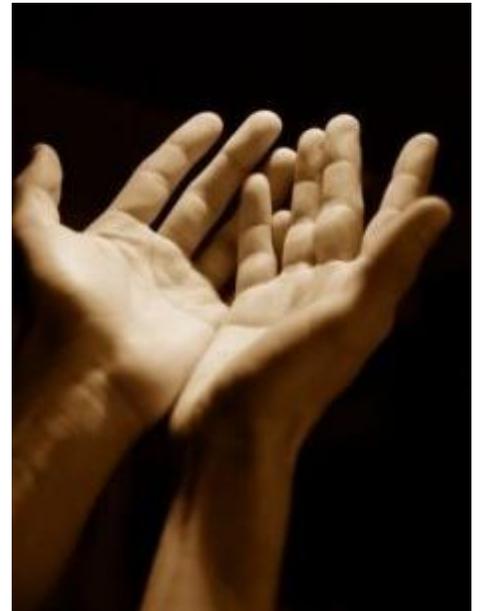
## *The Liturgy of the Holy Communion*

The second part of the Holy Eucharist is called the *Liturgy of the Holy Communion*. This second part begins with the *Offertory*. This isn't a time for the Church just to collect money from parishioners. The *Offertory* is an offering of our selves at the beginning of the Liturgy of the Holy Communion. As is said in the Rite I Eucharistic prayer, "here we offer before you, ourselves, our souls and bodies."

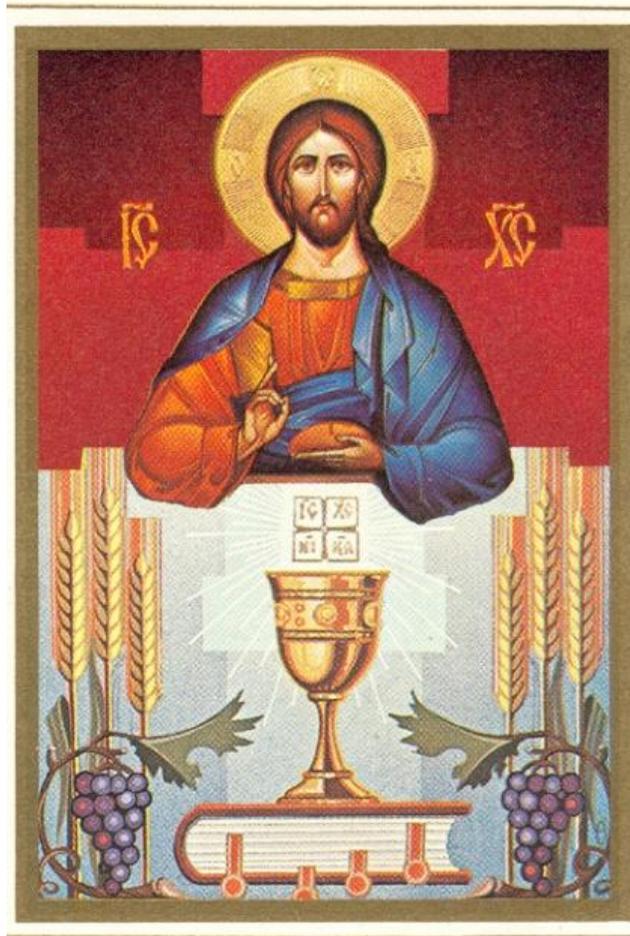
The *Offertory* continues the arc of the Confession and Peace in our movement together toward God and one another.

In the *Offertory*, the people gathered, now in right relationships with God and one another, offer their lives to God in the "sacrifice of praise and thanksgiving." This echoes St Paul's words: "I appeal to you therefore, brothers and sisters, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship." (Romans 12:1)

In the offering of ourselves, symbolized in the money, the bread, and the wine, we ask God to transform our offering into that which will sanctify us and make us God's own people. The money is a symbol of our labors, so we ask God to transform our labors into the *opus dei*, the work of God. The bread and wine are common elements of food, so we ask God to transform them into the Body and Blood of Jesus, so we who receive him will also be transformed.



Thus, we are ready to begin the *Eucharistic Prayer*, also called the *Great Thanksgiving* and also known in the Orthodox Church as the "anaphora" (literally: "offering"). The Eucharistic Prayer has 12 common elements.



## *The Eucharistic Prayer*

Here is an outline and commentary on our Eucharistic prayer in the Church using Eucharistic Prayer A as the example.



1) The beginning of the Eucharistic Prayer is often referred to as the ***Opening Dialogue*** because it is, in fact, a dialogue between the priest and people. Traditionally it has been called the *sursum corda*, which in Latin means: "lift up your hearts."

*Priest: The Lord be with you.*

*People: And also with you.*

*Priest: Lift up your hearts.*

*People: We lift them to the Lord.*

*Priest: Let us give thanks to the Lord our God.*

*People: It is right to give God thanks and praise.*



2) The next part is the ***Praise and Thanksgiving*** where the priest acknowledges the primary purpose for our gathering together as God's people.

*It is right, and a good and joyful thing, always and everywhere to give thanks to you, Father Almighty, Creator of heaven and earth. Therefore we praise you, joining our voices with Angels and Archangels and with all the company of heaven, who forever sing this hymn to proclaim the glory of your Name:*



3) The ***Sanctus*** ("Holy") and the ***Benedictus qui venit*** ("Blessed is he who comes") is an ancient hymn of the Church combining praise language from the Hebrew scriptures as well as elements from the Gospel account of Jesus' entry into Jerusalem on Palm Sunday.

*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.*



4) Then comes the ***Salvation Story***. In every Eucharistic prayer this part always reminds those gathered why we need salvation, who it is who saves us, and how that salvation was accomplished.

*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 on the cross, and offered himself in obedience to your will, a perfect sacrifice for the whole world.*



5) Next comes the ***Institution Narrative*** and it is a straight quote from chapter 11 of St. Paul's First Letter to the Corinthians. This tells us how it is we came to the practice of Eucharist.

*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." 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."*



6) Next comes the ***Memorial Acclamation***, which is the people's response to the *Institution Narrative*. Presented with this Sacramental gift, the people can do nothing other than to proclaim the mystery of faith:

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



7) Continuing on from the *Memorial Acclamation*, we have what is traditionally known as the **Anamnesis**, which literally means "memorial." The priest proclaims:

*We celebrate the memorial of our redemption, O Father, in this sacrifice of praise and thanksgiving.*

The *Anamnesis* is the antithesis to amnesia. People with amnesia have lost their identity and purpose because they do not know who they are, whom they belong to, or where they are headed. To know these things you must be able to remember. For Christians, the death and resurrection of Jesus is a present reality and memory where Jesus *re-members* us; where he puts our members back together. It is in our gathering together proclaiming Jesus' death, resurrection, and coming again that we are *re-membered* to God.



8) The **Oblation** follows the *Anamnesis*, because in our recalling of what God has done for the world in Jesus we can do nothing other than offer back to God what God has given us. Thus, the priest says:

*Recalling his death, resurrection, and ascension, we offer you these gifts.*

"These gifts" include ourselves made tangible in the bread and wine and in the monetary gifts we make that represent our life and labor.



9) Next comes the **Epiclesis** or the *Invocation of the Holy Spirit*. On behalf of the people gathered, the priest proclaims over the gifts of bread and wine:

*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.*

It is God's Holy Spirit that transforms the bread and wine into the Body and Blood of Jesus.



10) Following the *Epiclesis* we have the ***Supplications***:

*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.*

This is important for us to remember. The bread and wine aren't the only things sanctified, made holy, and sacred. We are as well. We supplicate (ask) God to make us holy so that we have the capability of faithfully receiving the sacrament and so that we will have the capacity to serve God and, at the end of that earthly service, to join the saints in God's eternal kingdom.



11) To all we have just proclaimed, we conclude with the ***Doxology*** and the ***People's Amen***. The priest concludes with:

*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 forever.*

***AMEN.***

The *Doxology* sums up what has been accomplished in the prayer, and it acknowledges that it is only "by" Jesus that we can offer this prayer; it is only "with" Jesus that we can live faithfully; and, it is only "in" Jesus that we have the assurance of eternal life.



12) The ***Post-Communion Prayer*** in Rite II is just two simple sentences. The first sentence offers God thanks for what God has done.

*Eternal God, heavenly Father, you have graciously accepted us as living members of your Son our Savior Jesus Christ, and you have fed us with spiritual food in the Sacrament of his Body and Blood.*

God has graciously accepted and received us as part of Christ's Body, the Church. The second sentence presents us with the consequence of such gracious acceptance.

*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.*

We are to go out into the world to be the hands and heart of Christ. The Priest's blessing and the deacon's dismissal underscores this movement from worship in the Church to action in the world, which **ends** the worship but actually **begins** the service. As Bishop Frank Weston said: "We cannot worship Jesus at the altar if we do not serve him in the streets."

