

# Teaching Eucharist

5<sup>th</sup> October



## Opening hymn and welcome

Singing hymns and songs goes right back to the earliest forms of worship, centuries before Jesus's time. Saint Paul said, "Be filled with the Spirit, as you sing psalms and hymns and spiritual songs to one another, singing and making melody to the Lord in your hearts."

Good hymns teach us the faith of the church. When we sing we worship with our whole body, and there's a lovely expression which says, "When you sing, you pray twice," meaning not just the words, but the act of singing is worship itself. And when we sing together, we encourage each other in our faith and our fellowship.

We used the word liturgy earlier. It's a Greek word that comes from the root words for "people" and "work," so the Liturgy is "the work of the people:" the best work we can do is to worship God! The liturgy is not something that the clergy do and the congregation watches. We all do it together – it's an activity that belongs to us all.

Our liturgy is a Eucharist, another Greek word meaning "Thanksgiving." It's also called Communion, because we commune – we share with God and each other as the Body of Christ.

In the Eucharist, we give thanks for what God has done for us in Jesus Christ.

We follow the tradition that believes the Eucharist should be our central act of worship, which unites us with Christians around the world, and throughout history. Jesus said "Do this in remembrance of me," and so we do. Our tradition of celebrating the Eucharist goes right back to the early church, and to Jesus himself.

The hangings on the altar and lectern, and the priest's robes, change with the seasons of the church year, and for certain festivals. It's green right now for 'ordinary time', but 'ordinary' doesn't mean plain or boring. It's a time for growth and new life, and so green is the colour of creation.

We change to white or gold for Christmas, Easter, and some Saints' days. We use red for the gift of the Spirit – the burning fire – at Pentecost, for the Passion on Palm Sunday, and when we remember saints who were martyrs. And it's purple in the seasons of penitence and preparation – Advent and Lent.

## **Kyrie, Confession and Absolution, Gloria, Collect**

The Kyrie – Lord have mercy, and the Gloria, goes back the earliest Christian worship. And the angels first sang Glory to God in the highest, to the shepherds!

The Collect, after the Gloria, is a prayer which changes each week, and across the year ‘collects’ all our needs and concerns together. In church you might hear it pronounced **Coll**-ect, as it was in the 16<sup>th</sup> century, when Thomas Cranmer created the first Book of Common Prayer and wrote the original collects. We use many of the same collects to this day.

## **Readings**

A Eucharist service is in two main parts – the Word, and the Sacrament. Firstly the Word: four readings altogether including the psalm, two from the Old Testament, and two from the New Testament. As in the synagogue in Jesus’ time, they follow a set pattern and relate to each other, a pattern called the Lectionary, so that over three years almost all of the Bible is read aloud.

We’re now in Year C, and the new year will start on the first Sunday of Advent. Most Christian churches across the world use the same pattern. We are connected worldwide as we hear the word of God.

We give a lot of time to the Bible readings in our worship, because of how important God’s word is to us, as Christians and as Anglicans. Anglicans follow the Protestant principle that every

believer has the right to read and understand the Bible for themselves.

Standing for the Gospel shows the special emphasis we place on Jesus’s own words and actions, and we read from within the congregation, showing how the Word of God came amongst us. Singing Alleluia, which means ‘Praise to God’ in Hebrew before and after it is another way of showing how important Jesus’s words are to us.

We know that Jesus preached in the synagogue to help everyone there learn more about God’s word, and how to live it in our lives. In medieval times, sermons were less common, but at the Protestant reformation from the 16<sup>th</sup> century, preaching became much more important as Christians wanted to understand their faith for themselves. This is when you started to see churches being built with the pulpit as the main focus, instead of the altar.

## **Nicene Creed, intercessions (prayers)**

The Nicene Creed goes back to the year 325, and it would take a long time to talk about everything we say we believe in, so that will be for another day. But when we say it all together, we know we’re joining with Christians across seventeen hundred years, saying that we believe in God: Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

Then we come to our time of prayer. It’s important to speak our prayers out loud, and offer to God the things we’re concerned for, and thankful for too. We remember people in need around the

world, and in our own country; other Christians and our own church leaders, people who are sick and who've died. We should pray for ourselves too, as we do our best to follow Jesus.

### **Peace, Offertory hymn**

The Peace is like a bridge as we move from the Liturgy of the Word to the Liturgy of the Sacrament. In the very early church, if you weren't baptised yet, you had to leave at this point!

Communion was considered to be so holy, you could only see it and receive it if you were a full member of the Church.

When we share the peace with each other, we're recognising that we meet Christ in other people – our neighbours in the pew, whether they are friends, family, acquaintances, or visitors.

In our Offertory hymn, the bread and wine and our collection are brought up to the altar too. In the early church, worshippers brought bread and wine with them. Some was consecrated for the service, and the rest taken to the poor in the area. Today, part of our collection continues to help people in need around our community and around the world.

### **Eucharistic preparation and prayer**

The Eucharist is made up of four essential acts: the offertory – when we give the bread and wine; the giving of thanks, which is the prayer over the bread; the breaking of the bread, and finally the communion when we share

the bread and the wine. We mirror what Jesus did at the last supper: he took the bread, blessed it, broke it, and gave it to his disciples.

White cloths or altar linens: the corporal (from the Latin for body, referring to the Body of Christ) is a large square which goes on the altar first, to catch any crumbs and protect the altar cloth.

The pall covers the chalice until we're ready to use it. The purificator is used to wipe the chalice after each person receives the wine, and to clean it after communion.

The wafers are in a bowl called a ciborium. The server pours enough wine into the chalice and mixes it with a little water: this was a normal practice at Jewish meals, and reminds us of the water and blood that came from Jesus's side when he died.

The priest washes their fingers using a little bowl called a lavabo, which also symbolises all of us being washed or purified before we receive the body of Christ. 'Lavabo' means 'I will wash' in Latin.

There are different versions of the Eucharistic prayer but they always include: giving God thanks and praise, remembering God's actions in creating and redeeming the world, telling the story of Jesus's last meal, and asking God to send the Holy Spirit to bless and sanctify both us and the bread and wine. It begins with the invitation to lift up our hearts and join in the song of heaven,

the Sanctus, or ‘Holy, holy, holy, Lord God of hosts.’

When we repeat the words and actions of Jesus’s last meal with his disciples, we join the story and make it our own. Christ offered his own body on the cross, and we offer ourselves in our love and service. As with the Creed, there’s so much more we could say about the Eucharist, and that can be for another day. What’s important is that in the bread and wine, we both receive and become part of the Body of Christ.

The prayer finishes with us praying the Lord’s Prayer, making the connection between our daily bread, and the spiritual food we receive in the Eucharist: both are needed in our daily lives! The Agnus Dei, Lamb of God, is an ancient song reminding us that John the Baptist called Jesus the sacrificial lamb who takes away the sins of the world.

### **Invitation to Communion**

It used to be that you could only receive communion if you were baptised and confirmed, or if you could say you understood everything that happens in a service. Now we think of communion as an invitation to God’s table – God’s love for us has no limits, everyone is welcome, and we never have to pass a test to receive it. Therefore everyone present is always welcome to receive the bread and wine when they come to worship. Or if they prefer, to receive a blessing, which shows God’s love for them as well.

Whether you receive the bread, or the wine, or both, you’re still fully receiving communion.

A lot of us stopped receiving wine after the pandemic, but please be reassured that because of the way the cup is wiped and turned after each person receives, it is quite safe.

### **Dismissal**

The last part of the service – the Dismissal – is not “dismissal” as in “you must go now”, but in the sense of sending us out into the world to be the Church.

In the Eucharist we have experienced the whole Christian life in one hour: we have studied, prayed, repented, given thanks, been filled with grace, and committed ourselves to mission.

And we have also heard the whole Christian story of Jesus: his birth and his life, his death and resurrection. Finally in the dismissal we relive Pentecost, when the Holy Spirit came to the disciples and they were sent out into the world to spread the good news. Alleluia!