

THE SERVICE FOR THE LORD'S DAY

The Eucharist

Offering

The Christian life is marked by the offering of one's self to God to be shaped, empowered, directed, and changed by God. In worship, God presents us with the costly self-offering of Jesus Christ. We are claimed by Christ and set free. In response to God's love in Jesus Christ we offer God our lives, our gifts, our abilities, and our material goods, for God's service.

Silence or appropriate music may accompany the gathering of the people's offerings. The tithes and offerings are gathered and received with prayer, spoken or sung.

From early centuries in Christian history, the offering has been the occasion for presenting the bread and wine to be used in the Lord's Supper. When the Lord's Supper is to be celebrated, gifts of bread and wine may therefore be brought to the table in thanksgiving for God's Word. If the elements are already in place, they are made ready for celebrating the Sacrament.

When the service does not include the Lord's Supper, the offering is followed by prayers of thanksgiving, ending with the Lord's Prayer. The service is then concluded with a hymn, spiritual, canticle, or psalm, and with the charge and blessing.

Invitation to the Lord's Table

From New Testament times the celebration of the Eucharist on each Lord's Day has been the norm of Christian worship. The Eucharist was given by Christ himself. Before church governments were devised, before creeds were formalized, even before the first word of the New Testament was written, the Lord's Supper was firmly fixed at the heart of Christian faith and life. From the church's inception, the Lord's Day and the Lord's Supper were joined. Along with the reading and proclamation of the scripture, the Eucharist has given witness to God's redemptive acts each Lord's Day, giving Christian worship its distinctive shape.

In this sacrament, the bread and wine, the words and actions, make the promises of God visible and concrete. The Word proclaimed in scripture and sermon is confirmed, for all that the life, death, and resurrection of Christ means is focused in the Sacrament.

It is appropriate, therefore, that the Eucharist be celebrated as often as on each Lord's Day. It shall be celebrated regularly and frequently enough so that it is clear to all that the Lord's Supper is integral to worship on the Lord's Day, and not an addition to it.

In the Eucharist the church blesses God for all that God has done, is doing, and promised to do, and offers itself in obedient service to God's reign. The church is renewed and empowered as in thanksgiving it remembers Christ's life, death, resurrection, and promised return. The people of God are sustained by the promised presence of Christ, and are assured of participation in Christ's self-offering. Christ's love is received, the covenant is renewed, and the power of Christ's reign for the renewing of the earth is proclaimed. Being made one with Christ, we are made one with all who belong to Christ, united with the church in every time and place. In this sacrament we also participate in God's future as well. It is a glad resurrection feast. Gathering around this table, the church anticipates the great banquet of the new age in God's eternal kingdom.

The Lord's Supper is therefore more than a reminder of Christ's sacrificial death and resurrection. It is a means, given us by Christ, through which the

risen Lord is truly present as a continuing power and reality, until the day of his coming. Lord is truly present as a continuing power and reality, until the day of his coming. While the meaning of Christ's sacrificial death is at the heart of this sacrament, it is a resurrected, living Christ whom we encounter through the bread and the wine.

The many-faceted meaning of this sacrament is seen in the names given to it. The title Lord's Supper recalls Jesus' institution of the sacrament with his disciples. Eucharist (thanksgiving) reminds us that we receive all of the benefits of God's grace with joy. Holy Communion reminds us that in this sacrament we are made one with Christ and with each other. The Breaking of the Bread describes the sacramental action by which Christ is known to his disciples.

Great Thanksgiving

The Lord's Table, having been set, the one presiding then leads the people in the great thanksgiving. This prayer with its emphasis on thankful praise has been of central importance to this sacrament from very early centuries in Christian worship. Thanksgiving is so important to this sacrament that it has been given the name of Eucharist (from the New Testament Greek word *eucharistia*, meaning thanksgiving).

We praise God for all God's mighty acts in the past, present, and future.

God is praised for:

creating all things,
the providence of God,
establishing the covenant,
giving the law,
the witness of the prophets,
God's boundless love and mercy in spite of human failure,
the ultimate gift of Christ,
the immediate occasion of festival.

There may be an acclamation of praise, in which we join in one voice, with choirs of angels and with the faithful of every time and place, in adoration of the triune God: "Holy, holy, holy Lord," the song of the heavenly hosts, eternally being sung before God's majesty (Isa. 6:1-5)

Christ's work of redemption is recalled with thanks:

His birth, life, and ministry, his death and resurrection, the promise of his coming again, the gift of the Sacrament.

There may be an acclamation of faith, in which we joyfully acclaim Christ who died, is risen and will come again.

The Holy Spirit is called upon to draw the people into the presence of the risen Christ, and to make the breaking of the bread and sharing of the cup a communion in the body and blood of Christ, that the people may be nourished with Christ's body, made one with all the faithful in heaven and earth, kept faithful as Christ's body, representing Christ in ministry in the world, in anticipation of the fulfillment of the kingdom Christ proclaimed.

The prayer concludes with an ascription of praise to the triune God.