THE LITURGY EXPLORED

What is liturgy?

Worship: A human response to a Holy God
Worth--ship, highly valuing, assignment of absolute worth
Homo Adorans
BCP p. 857 Adoration is lifting up of heart and mind to God, asking nothing but to enjoy God's presence.
Corporate Worship
BCP p. 857 We unite ourselves with others to Acknowledge holiness of God, hear God's Word, offer prayer, and celebrate the sacraments.

Liturgy: A public work done at private cost
Christ as Liturgy: Gave his life for the life of the world
An ordered service for corporate worship
"True liturgy is the expression of the authentic Christian community"
The sacramental principle: outward things convey spiritual realities. Discuss crosses, icons, music
Jesus becoming flesh as the ultimate sacramental action
Morning & Evening Prayer, The Eucharist

Elements of Liturgy:

Sacrifice--making something holy by offering it to God
Christ is the one sacrifice
Priesthood--discerning and communicating the will of God
Christ is the one priest
Prayer
Ritual

THE SUNDAY LITURGY

THE LITURGY OF THE WORD

Gather in the Lord's Name
- Entrance Hymn
- Collect for Purity
- Trisagion (or Kyrie or Gloria)

Proclaim and Respond to the Word of God
- The First Reading (OT)
- Psalm
- Second Reading (NT)
- The Gospel
- The Sermon
- The Nicene Creed

Pray for the World and the Church
- Prayers of the People
- Confession/Absolution

Exchange the Peace

THE LITURGY OF THE TABLE

Prepare the Table
- Offertory & Hymn

Make Eucharist
- Dialogue
- Prayer of Blessing (Preface)
- Institution
- Oblation (Anamnesis)
- Invocation (Epiclesis)
- Intercession
- Congregational Affirmation (the Great Amen)

Break the Bread
- The Lord's Prayer
- Breaking the Bread
- Pascha Nostrum
- Agnus Dei

Share the Gifts of God
- Holy Communion
- Hymn After Communion
- Post-Communion Prayer
- The Blessing
- Dismissal

Some Elements of Our Worship:

(If you have any questions or wish to explore the subjects below in more detail, please ask the parish priest or a parishioner.)

Incense: This ancient practice is thoroughly grounded in biblical tradition. In the Book of Malachi, it says "From the rising of the sun to its setting my Name shall be great among the nations, and in every place incense shall be offered to my Name..." Incense is used as a way of symbolizing our prayers as they rise to heaven, it is used to bless the altar, icons, and congregation. At the Gospel Procession, it also symbolizes the words of redemption Jesus speaks to the People of God.

Candles: The use of candles is symbolic of the presence of God in out midst, and also reminds us of Christ's statement that He is the Light of the world. To the right of the altar you will see a rack of votive candles. These candles are used for intercessory prayer. Lighting a candle after praying symbolizes the continuous offering of prayer by the Church for its members. The flickering of the votive candles reminds us that others have been here before us, asking for us to join them in prayer.

Bells: The bells rung during the Eucharist are there simply as a way of drawing our attention to the action occurring at that moment. Bells have a way of getting our attention, and the Church is not adverse to that.

Icons: Icon is a Greek word for "Image". The icons are images of holiness; however, we do not worship them. We worship through them. An icon is like a window into heaven. When we look at the icon of St. Timothy hanging over the bishop's chair in the sanctuary, we are not looking at a mere picture, we are looking at the image of one who went before us, offering his life to God. The icon is in effect a kind of prayer that we will share, along with the person pictured, in the love and service of God.

Prayers for the Departed: At several points in the Liturgy, we pray for the dead. This has a way of generating many questions from those new to our traditions. In the Epistle to the Hebrews we are reminded that we are "surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses." This phrase serves to show us that the Holy Church is not just those people present in this building on this Sunday morning, nor is it only those people who worship in churches around the world in our own time. Indeed, the Church is made up of all Christians from the very beginning of its ministry. The Body of Christ is not limited to a particular space or time. While it is not clear exactly what happens after a person dies, we are assured that death does not cut us off from the love of God or the life of the Body of Christ. Thus, we continue to pray for those who have died, just as we would pray for those who live with us today.

Vestments: The special garments the priest wears during the Liturgy are called *vestments*. The large poncho-like garment is called a *chasuble*. It is worn only at the Eucharist. The long thin cloth hanging around the priest's neck is a *stole*; this is a sign of the priest's authority as the Bishop's representative to this congregation. After the service, you will normally see the priest wearing a *cassock*; this is a long, black, thin coat. The cassock was originally worn to keep those serving in the sanctuary warm; churches until very recently were unheated.

Vestments vary in color depending on the season of the Church Year; they also serve to turn our attention away from the individual who serves as celebrant to the office the priest occupies.

The Church Year: Many people from other Christian traditions ask why we place so great an emphasis on the Church (or Liturgical) Year. While it is not possible to point out all of the reasons here, a few remarks should be made.

As far as we can go back in Christian history, Christians have attached special significance to various parts of the year. All Christians are familiar with Christmas and Easter; these are parts

of the whole drama of the Church Year. The Church Year follows the life of Christ, from our preparation for His coming into the world (the season of Advent) through His birth (Christmas), ministry, Passion (Holy Week), death (Good Friday), resurrection (Easter) and ascension. These seasons conclude with the feast marking the birth of the Church—Pentecost. The season following Pentecost than stretches around to another Advent.

The Church Year is a vast treasury to which we return every year. It is one of the great joys of our tradition. Each feast, each fast has a significance which leads us to a deeper understanding of the Scriptures and our life in the world as Christians.

Commentary by the Rev. Brandon Filbert
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Before Beginning

It is customary to genuflect (bend the right knee to the ground) when entering or leaving your pew; this is done as a sign of reverence for the presence of Jesus in the reserved Sacrament in this church building. Genuflecting is not, however, something which we require. It is done not because it is essential, but because it is a physical demonstration of an outward appreciation of God's presence and power. Often, before the worship service begins, you will see people kneeling and saying prayers. It is our habit to use this time as a preparation to hear God's word to us in scripture, and to partake of the Sacrament of His Body and Blood.

As we prepare to begin, the organ plays a prelude. After that, the opening hymn will announce the beginning of the liturgy itself. It is our custom to stand for the procession, and to bow as the processional cross passes us. Again, this is not a rule, but an act of devotion.

During the hymn, the celebrant (the priest or bishop who presides at the Eucharist) censes the altar as a sign of its holiness. The altar represents the body of Christ, and as such, is given special reverence.

The celebrant now turns to the congregation and says the opening salutation, "Blessed be God..." which appears to the right. This joyous acclamation of the reign of God, made with the sign of the cross in the Name of the Holy and Undivided Trinity, announces that in our worship the Kingdom of God is made manifest. Note: During the Eucharist, you will see people make the sign of the cross at various times; this ancient devotion is made at the mention of the Trinity or at times of special blessing. As with all devotions, it is not a rule but a way of allowing our bodies to mirror our inward faith.

After this, the celebrant says a prayer that asks God to fill us with His Holy Spirit so that we may worship in Truth and in union with him.

During most times of the year, either the Trisagion or the Kyrie (ancient Greek hymns of repentance) is sung at this point. In either case, the hymn is sung three times in succession.

The Collect of the Day is a type of prayer which summarizes the theme for that particular Sunday or Holy Day. As with all prayers the celebrant says, the congregation participates through silent association and by saying "Amen" (meaning "so be it") at its conclusion.

After the collect, we have finished "shaking the dust" off of our feet and are ready for the readings from Holy Scripture. This part of the service is called the Liturgy of the Word. After the Old Testament reading, we respond by saying, "Thanks be to God."

A psalm is then sung, in the manner of the early church, by alternating between cantor (singing verses) and the congregation (singing a refrain). The words to the refrain, as well as the music, are in your bulletin.

After a reading from the New Testament (again responding "Thanks be to God"), we prepare for the reading from the Gospel. This is the high point of the Liturgy of the Word. Often we sing a hymn and/or sing the word "alleluia" before the Gospel reading as an expression of joy in the words of Christ; incense is also used for this purpose. The Gospel is read in the midst of the congregation to remind us that Christ preached the Gospel in the midst of His people, and continues to do so today.

After the Gospel, the sermon is preached. The sermon is a response to the Word of God proclaimed in Scripture, and is meant to provide us spiritual nourishment and an understanding of God's word to us today.

The Offertory, too often seen as merely a time for giving money, is the time when the elements (bread, wine, water) are brought forward. Together with these and other offerings (food for the needy, for instance) we offer up our lives to God, asking that they be transformed by His Grace into pure and spotless offerings.

The Holy Communion

We are told that at the Last Supper, Jesus
1. Took bread and wine,
2. Blessed it,
3. Broke the bread, and
4. Gave it to His disciples.

In the Liturgy, these actions correspond to
1. The Offertory
2. The Canon or Eucharistic Prayer
3. The Fraction
4. The Communion.

Much of the liturgy is derived from ancient sources, often from the earliest period in the Church's history; other parts were added over centuries of Christian experience. In effect, we stand at one end of a great chain of worshippers stretching from the first-called disciples to ourselves today.

The word *Eucharist* is Greek for "thanksgiving." As Christians, we are called always to be giving thanks to God for Creation and for the gift of His only Son, Jesus the Christ. Thus, when we gather as a Christian family, we do as Christ willed us to do, when on the night before His passion and death He instituted the Holy Communion.

The *Sanctus* is an ancient hymn part of which is derived from the vision of God's glory beheld by the Prophet Isaiah. It is a song of pure joy and exultation by the People of God to their creator. It is followed by the Benedictus, "Blessed is He who comes in the Name of the Lord." This is the song the people sang at Jesus' entry into Jerusalem.

People wishing to do so may now come to the altar rail to receive Communion. All are welcome to come to the altar rail to share in the Holy Communion who have been baptized with water in the Name of the Trinity, and who recognize the Real Presence of Jesus Christ in the Sacred Bread and Wine.

It is our custom when receiving Communion to kneel at the rail, put our hands with the left palm forming a cradle for the right hand. The celebrant places the Bread in our hand, after which we lift it to our mouth. If you choose to take the Wine, please help guide the chalice to your mouth. You can signal the chalice-bearer that you do not wish to receive the Wine by crossing your arms over your chest. After receiving, we respond with "Amen" as a sign of our acceptance of these gifts as the body and blood of the Risen One, Jesus Christ.

After a hymn, the celebrant leads us in a post-communion prayer. This prayer sums up what we have just done, and bids us to go out into the world to serve God in all whom we meet.

After this, the celebrant will give the congregation a blessing in the Name of the Most Holy Trinity. This is done to remind us of the banner under which we leave, and to emphasize the fact that when we leave the church building, God is with us everywhere we may venture.

The conclusion of the Liturgy comes with the Dismissal, a brief sentence telling us to go out into the world to serve God, to which we respond, "Thanks be to God."

It is our custom to remain standing in our places until the celebrant and acolytes have exited. Then it is appropriate to kneel in prayer, thanking God for this chance to worship Him, and also to say a prayer for the ministry of the celebrant and all others who serve at the altar.

Book Plugs

The Liturgy Explained - Thomas Howard
An easy to read and very informative small book about the specifics of the liturgical worship.

Liturgy for Living - The Churches Teaching series
A helpful book from the Episcopal Church's teaching series which lays a good foundation for worship as an integrative act.

Say but the Word - Theodore E. Dobson
An excellent study in the Eucharist as a place of transformation. A rich and practical guide to spiritual growth through the liturgy of the Eucharist.

For the Life of the World - Alexander Schmemann
A book for those with a theological bend of mind. A serious study of the Eucharist from the an Eastern Orthodox liturgiologist. A very stimulating book with a great sense of the mystical elements of the faith and worship of the church.

Answering God - Eugene Peterson
An extremely readable and highly insightful book about the Psalms as tools for prayer.