

ST. ELIZABETH EPISCOPAL CHURCH



Explanatory Bulletin: Welcome to St. Elizabeth Church!

This booklet contains expanded background information for the service of the Episcopal Holy Mass, also called the Holy “Eucharist” – a word that means “thanksgiving” in Greek. This bulletin will make more sense if used in conjunction with a specific Sunday bulletin and the red Book of Common Prayer. Underlined words refer to parts of the Mass found in the Sunday bulletin.

Since the beginning of the church, the Holy Spirit has gathered Christians together to break bread and give thanks to God through Jesus Christ. The traditional service of Holy Eucharist is divided into two parts: “The liturgy of the Word” and “The Liturgy of the Table.” The first part is similar to a Jewish synagogue service that includes readings from Scripture, a response to God’s word from the pulpit, songs and prayers.

The second portion of the Mass is what makes it a distinctively Christian form of worship. In it, we observe the meal Jesus shared with his apostles. We trust that this action draws us closer to God and to one another.

No posture or gesture that we make in worship is required of everyone. In whatever we do, we try to point to God. Please know that we are delighted that you have come to worship with us. We encourage you to keep your children in the service as much as possible. The liturgy is as much for them to participate in, as it is for adults. Sitting closer to the front tends to keep children more focused on the liturgy and they absorb more than you might imagine!

HOLY EUCHARIST

About Liturgical Seasons: Some denominations, like the Episcopal Church, are called “liturgical” churches, in part because they celebrate different seasons: Advent, Christmas, Epiphany, Lent, Holy Week, Easter, Pentecost and Ordinary Time. If you look at the altar and the priest’s clothing, called “vestments,” you will notice that they are matching colors. Each season has a color associated with it, so the color on the altar can usually tell you which season we are in.

We use blue for Advent, white/gold for Christmas and Easter, green for Epiphany and Ordinary Time, purple for Lent and red for Pentecost. (Some Sundays are also feast days that may call for white or red.)

We ask that all cell phones be turned off or to silent, and that no flash photography be taken during worship. We also ask that you please respect the silence in the sanctuary.

Prelude: The organist or other musician plays an instrumental or two intended to give the congregation time to settle in to God’s space, to pray and to prepare themselves for worship. There will be a silent pause for a moment after the prelude. If there is no musician, the sound of a bell may be the signal that the Mass is beginning.

Entrance Rite: With some exceptions (Ash Wednesday, the First Sunday in Lent, the Easter Vigil), the Mass typically begins with a seasonally appropriate entrance hymn found in the blue hymnal. Hymn numbers chosen for the Mass are often displayed on the hymn-board near the front of the church or in the worship bulletin. As the music begins, please stand if you can or rise in your heart. As the altar party walks into the worship space, some worshippers like to bow in reverence to the cross as it passes to honor Christ.

When the hymn ends, while the people stand, the presider (an ordained Anglican priest or bishop) chants or says the opening acclamation to which the people respond. The words used depend on the season, but all are an invitation from the Presider to the people gathered to enter into a dialogue in God’s presence.

Next, we sing a version of one of three ancient canticles: the Gloria, the Kyrie or the Trisagion. These and all hymn numbers preceded by an “S” are found in the front of the hymnal. The “S” stands for “service.”

The Gloria has been in use since the 4th c., and opens with the words that the angels sang to announce the birth of the Christ-child. The Kyrie is a song of praise in Greek that connects us to the early church and the Trisagion is a gift from our Eastern Orthodox brothers and sisters. These last two are sung or said three times in acknowledgement of the Holy Trinity.

Liturgy of the Word: The presider chants or says to the people: “The Lord be with you” to which the people respond, “And also with you.” This continues the dialogue. Then the presider chants or says: “Let us pray” followed by the collect of the day. This is the theme prayer that changes every Sunday to gather (hence, “collect”) the congregation around a subject. When the Presider concludes the collect, the people respond with “Amen,” which means “let it be so.”

The presider and the people then sit for the readings. Our custom for most Masses is to first hear a reading from the Old Testament. (There are a handful of Bibles in a few of the pews for those who have trouble hearing, but the readings are meant to be experienced out loud.) Then we most often pray a psalm or canticle together, led by a lay person at the lectern. Next, we hear a reading from the New Testament (often called the “epistle”). At the end of the first and second readings, the reader (or “lector”) will say: “The Word of the Lord,” to which the congregation responds: “Thanks be to God.”

The readings are typically followed by a gradual hymn, so named because it was sung on the step (Latin: *gradus*) of the altar. During the hymn, the congregation rises and turns as the Presider or Deacon and an altar server (or “acolyte”) walk to the center of the sanctuary.

There, the presider proclaims the Holy Gospel, by first saying: “The Holy Gospel of Our Lord Jesus Christ according to St. (Matthew, Mark, Luke or John).” The people reply and the same pattern repeats at the end of the Gospel. The word “gospel” is Greek. In English, it means “good news” and has been used as a description for the message of Christ since the earliest days.

It is also a title applied to the first four books of the New Testament – those portraying the events of Jesus’ life, and His words to His followers. We proclaim the Gospel from the middle of the congregation because we trust the Word Made Flesh to be there in our very midst.

After a period of intentional silence, the preacher (who may or may not be the presider) goes to the pulpit to begin our response

to the liturgy of the Word. The people sit as the preacher offers a sermon that most often seeks to connect the words heard to our lives in the context of the liturgy.

After the sermon, unless the Mass is being held on a Baptismal Feast day, the congregation rises to say the Nicene Creed. The word “creed” does not imply one’s agreement with a set of mental precepts, but instead refers to giving one’s heart to the teachings (or “catechism”) of the Church. The Nicene Creed has been recited in Christian churches for more than 1,500 years. Originally written in the 4th century, the creed answers several heresies and outlines the boundaries of our theology in our relationship to the Holy Trinity.

Episcopalians emphasize the “apostolic” nature of the Church as the historic succession of the apostles through bishops to priests and deacons, as well as the passing on the apostles’ teachings. The term catholic (from the Greek, *kata-holos*, “according to the whole”) refers to that which makes our church one throughout the world, but it also includes our sense of the Anglican Communion as the third part of the Catholic Church along with Roman and Orthodox Catholics.

After we conclude the Creed, our intercessor announces which form of the prayers of the people we will use from the Book of Common Prayer. The different forms begin on p. 383, but often the responses are simple enough that you won’t need the book.

The presider concludes the prayers of the people with another “collect” appropriate to the season, and then invites us to confession and absolution. St. Paul taught us that we are to carefully examine our consciences before approaching God’s table to make sure that we are truthfully “in communion” with our brothers and sisters. We recall and offer to God those offenses that we have committed as individuals and those that we have committed as members of larger collectives. People who can kneel do so here, but the physical posture is not required so much as the spiritual attitude.

Jesus told us to forgive and to seek forgiveness before coming to the altar. When the prayer of confession is concluded, the presider stands and reassures us of God’s loving forgiveness of all those sins we have brought before God, open us God’s restorative healing. We trust God’s promise that our willingness to be changed (our “repentance”) grants our consent for God move in our spirits to redirect our minds and bodies in ways that are more life-giving.

Having been restored spiritually to Christ, our brothers and sisters, the presider now expresses the hope that God's peace will be present to us. The people respond back to Christ, to each other and to the presider, and then briefly greet each other. This can go on a bit at St. Elizabeth, but please do not feel any pressure to "work the room"!

To bring the congregation's attention back to the liturgy, the presider will introduce her- or himself, invite the congregation to a simple coffee and fellowship hour after the Mass. As part of God's family, we may make one or two announcements that affect the entire congregation, but the remainder of our announcements happen in the St. John Room after the Mass.

Having offered prayers for the larger church family, the presider now invites people present in the gathering to come forward to receive a blessing for the anniversary of a wedding, of their birth or baptism, or to receive healing prayer. The Holy Eucharist is, itself, a profoundly healing blessing, but people are often well-served by the additional anointing with Holy Oil. Anyone who feels drawn may come forward. With those prayers, the liturgy of the Word is concluded with the presider's invitation in an offertory sentence, often a sentence of Scripture such as "Walk in love, as Christ loved us and gave himself for us, a perfect sacrifice to God."

Liturgy of the Table: (Also called "Holy Communion") The people rise as the Offertory Hymn begins. The congregation sings as the ushers pass plates to gather gifts of money that represent our lives and our work. More than just the cash flow of the organized church, the money that we gather and return to God is a symbol of our gratitude for all that God has given us.

Consequently, the plates are brought to the altar along with bread and wine. The presider or a Deacon, who has been setting the table during the Offertory, accepts the gifts of the people and continues to prepare the altar. On feast days and during the seasons of Advent, Christmas and Easter, the presider will bless the altar with burning incense to further enhance the mystical nature of the liturgical experience. The incense we use is our own blend of the purest Somalian and North African frankincense available, and there are numerous studies that show it to be quite beneficial to human health and well-being. However, if you are particularly sensitive to incense, please feel free to sit in the back pews or along the windows, which you or an usher can open.

Whether there is incense or not, the presider washes her or his hands next. There are 3rd c. traces of a custom of hand-washing as a preparation for prayer on the part of all Christians, but from the 4th c. on it appears to have become customary only for clergy at the Eucharist to ceremonially to wash their hands accompanied by a prayer based on Psalm 26:6 as a symbol of inward purity.

At the conclusion of the hymn, when the presider or Deacon has finished preparing the table, the presider will begin the Great Thanksgiving. There are four versions in the Book of Common Prayer and the bulletin for the day will indicate which version we are using along with the appropriate page numbers. The people remain standing as the presider returns to dialogue with the congregation by chanting the phrases that begin all four Eucharistic prayers, called the “Sursum corda,” which is Latin for “Lift up your hearts.” The presider inserts a chanted prayer that names a particular reason for giving thanks that day. This is called the Proper Preface, and it changes from season to season.

After the proper preface, the presider will chant: “Therefore we praise you, joining our voices with Angels and Archangels and with all the company of heaven, who for ever sing this hymn to proclaim the glory of your Name.”

The congregation then joins their voices with the presider’s to sing or chant a Sanctus, which simply means “holy,” the first word of the canticle that refers to an ancient song of praise or “sanctus et benedictus” (Latin: “holy and blessed”) that adds references from Isaiah 6:3 and Revelation 4:8 with Psalm 118:26. Some version of this hymn has been included in Christian worship services since the first century.

The presider will continue after the Sanctus to pray the Words of Institution, drawn from Luke 22:19-22 and St. Paul’s first letter to the Corinthians 11:23-25. These moments are marked as significant by three elevations accompanied by bells in most of our Masses.

At slightly different points in each of the Eucharistic Prayer forms, there are words like “remembrance,” “recalling,” “memory” or “memorial.” These English words are deceptively inadequate translations of the original Greek word *anamnesis* (that means something like “making truly present again” or “re-actualizing”) that was used to record what Jesus Christ said at the Last Supper.

We are not, like many Protestants, simply remembering a dinner that Jesus had with friends. Like other Catholics, we trust that in Eucharistic, God the Creator of time and space transcends these

to make us present with Christ at the Last Supper, at the foot of the cross on Calvary and to make the Risen Christ present with us here and now.

Consequently, in the middle of the Eucharistic Prayer, the presider invites the congregation to join in a version of a memorial acclamation. Another gift from the Orthodox Catholics, this prayer ties our praise of God to the past, the present and the future across all time and space. Episcopalians also borrowed the invocation of the Holy Spirit (called the *epiclesis*) from the Orthodox by way of the 17th c. Scottish Prayer Book, the church that ordained America's first Episcopal bishop.

The presider concludes his or her part in the Eucharistic Prayer with a Trinitarian prayer (typically chanted) to which the people respond with an AMEN, all in capital letters because the priest has been speaking on the people's behalf. This AMEN (also typically chanted) is intended to be an assertive statement of agreement with what has just been said.

Next, just as the Eucharist Prayer began with the people and presider joining in the *Sursum corda*, now they once again join their voices to say or chant the Our Father. This prayer that Jesus gave the disciples in Matthew's Gospel has been part of the Eucharistic Service of the church since at least the 4th c.

Perhaps the most dramatic moment in the liturgy happens in stillness and silence as the presider lifts the blessed bread over the altar and breaks it. After a brief pause, the congregation sings a version of the Agnus dei ("Lamb of God"), while the presider breaks the bread into smaller pieces and the altar servers help to finish preparing the vessels of the altar.

As the canticle ends, the presider lifts the plate (called a "paten") with the blessed bread and the cup (called a "chalice") and chants or says the invitation to communion. The presider and altar party traditionally take communion first, a holdover from ancient days when the bread or wine, though blessed, may also have been poisoned or spoiled before being blessed. Many churches are moving away from that practice to a more modern hospitality that feeds others first.

In the early church, standing was the preferred posture for receiving communion, and this is still the preference in the Orthodox church. The presence of kneelers at St. Elizabeth makes kneeling easier for those who prefer, but neither is "wrong." Also, if you are allergic to wine or a person in recovery, you do not have to drink the wine. The Episcopal church presumes that in

receiving either the bread or the wine, we receive the Presence of Christ fully. You may wish to receive only the bread and then return to your pew before the cup is offered to you or you can simply cross your arms over your chest and the Eucharistic minister will simply hold the cup before you and say the words of administration.

We do ask that you not dip the bread into the wine, a practice called “intinction,” for two reasons. One is theological. The point of a common cup for Anglicans is to remind us that our salvation (“the gifts of God for the people of God”) is a collective salvation. Despite all the differences we bring, the Eucharistic is a foretaste of God’s harmony. The practice of intinction is a late 19th century development based on some spiritual confusion, some false assumptions about hygiene, and frequently some bigotry directed at the poor, non-whites and non-heterosexuals. The practice of dipping rather than drinking from a common cup risks alienating others, especially when we insist on dipping the bread ourselves.

The second reason is more practical. Dipping baked bread drips and leaves crumbs floating in the chalice for the next person, interfering with the dignity and beauty of the experience of the common cup. If intinction must be done, the presider will dip a wafer so that no fingers or other bodily additions are inadvertently donated to the blessed wine.

The presider and altar servers give the blessed bread and wine to the people. Occasionally, soft music will begin to accompany the distribution and continue as the presider and altar party consume the blessed wine, clean and remove the altar vessels and place the unconsumed bread in a temporary tabernacle under the chalice veil (the cloth cover).

The presider invites a final post-communion prayer, sometimes related to the season or feast day, but more commonly one of two available in the Book of Common Prayer. The bishop, if present, or the priest in the bishop’s stead says a blessing over the people further evoking the season or the feast and the congregation sings a closing hymn during which the altar party processes out, led by the cross. Some worshippers like to reverence the cross as it passes with a small bow to honor Christ. When the closing hymn ends, the presider or deacon gives a brief dismissal that sends the congregation out into the world.

Blessings on your faith walk, wherever it may take you. We are grateful that you came to worship with us today!