

# Second Sunday of Pentecost 29 May 2016

[1 Kings 18:20-21, \(22-29\), 30-39; Psalm 96; Galatians 1:1-12; Luke 7:1-10](#)

[The Shape of the Liturgy](#) Dom Gregory Dix

[Proper 4C / Ordinary 9C / Pentecost +2 May 29, 2016](#) Textweek

O worship the Lord in the beauty of all holiness: let the whole earth stand in awe of God.

The 'Feast of Corpus Christi' gives us an opportunity to look at the Eucharist, the liturgy of Holy Communion; what it means, why we do what we do Sunday by Sunday and in particular what changes we have introduced here at St Paul's and why we made such changes.

Before going through the actual service itself, let's appreciate that there are quite different and distinct orthodox understandings. The traditional 'Roman Catholic' stems from a literal appreciation of the biblical accounts of the last supper, the earliest being from 1 Corinthians:

"the Lord Jesus on the night when he was betrayed took bread, and when he had given thanks, he broke it, and said, "This is my body which is for you. Do this in remembrance of me". (1 Corinthians 11:23-24).

In the Roman tradition there is an understanding that we eat and drink the Body and blood of Christ; and the consecrated elements, the bread and the wine, are very much elevated into the realm of supernatural substances, so much so that they are themselves revered and adored as the very reality of Christ.

The protestant tradition which sought to correct some of the early and primitive understandings of the Church arguably threw the baby out with bath water and reduced the liturgy of Holy Communion to an act of remembrance, a reminder or a sort of passion play to retell the story of a past event.

And of course in between these two extremes, and even beyond these extreme understandings are various other equally helpful and unhelpful understandings. Likewise in our community here there will also be a variety of appreciations of what we are actually doing and why we're doing it.

Overall however it might be seen that what we engage in has a mystical quality that in many respects eludes a clear definition.

We gather together for an experience that draws us from the everyday into the dimension of 'wholeness', we encounter, like in a dreamscape, another experience of

reality that is somehow foundational to and feeding of, our deepest desire for knowing ourselves within the image of God.

So let's have a quick run through the 'service sheet' and identify some of the components so that we can perhaps more fully enter into an encounter of 'communion' and more specifically to more fully appreciate ourselves as part of this Divine encounter.

We enter the church, leaving behind the noise of the everyday, we enter into a space of peace, and we come past the font, the place of our birth, to take our place in the community.

Like many churches, we begin with a hymn and this both sets the scene and for those unable to find the common ground of peace it brings them together with the whole community.

Over time, the opening hymn has become a two-edged sword and one that we continue to wrestle with at St Paul's. Many (even most) hymns give voice to a primitive theology that we no longer believe in; and because of their delightful familiarity will often take us into another mindscape that is back in the past; we've all heard and even said "*I can remember singing that at school*".

So we acknowledge that quite often the wrong scene is being set for us when we 'stand and sing the first hymn'; however we can still appreciate that in the very act we are, even if awkwardly, seeking to find a harmony together and an experience of ourselves within a common voice.

Most churches then start the liturgy of the 'Word' with "Our service today begins on page 119" followed by the traditional greeting "*The Lord be with you*".

Here by following a 'service sheet' we are still very much able to retain the tradition of the wider Church but we have also given thoughtful preparation and reflection in readiness for our Eucharistic gathering. Each Sunday we do not repeat an off-the-shelf script, rather we encounter anew the mystical nature of 'communion'.

Our beginning is a statement of intent "*We meditate on the glory of the Creator*"; and these initial lines are an English translation of the 'Gyatri Mantra' a highly revered mantra from the Hindu scriptures (Vedas) and containing the formula [*bhūr bhuvah svah*] known as the "great (mystical) utterance". In these opening lines we are not only one with the wider Church, but we acknowledge a common ground with other faith traditions.

The ritual of lighting a candle by one of our younger members is delightfully significant; it acknowledges the place and participation of children in our communion,

it also symbolises that we are not the holders of all truth, for even the youngest have a light to enlighten us with.

The initial prayer of preparation, the sentence of the day, the *Kyrie eleison* and the Gloria; all echo what is being celebrated in every Anglican Church and also very closely echo the same for the Roman catholic tradition. So we come together with a familiarity, we know where we are, we hear ourselves share together the words that speak of all we about to share.

Next is the 'collect' which comes from the Latin *collecta*, and means the gathering of the people together; and at St Paul's we have written our own collects rather than using those translated into the prayer book by Thomas Cranmer in the 16<sup>th</sup> century.

Our collects rather than being demanding of God, like letters to Santa, reflect an appreciation of our being blessed by the Divine, who has given all and withheld nothing; they echo the readings of the day and underline the revelation of Christ; they are statements that affirm our potential and our promise.

The readings, the psalm and the Gospel all follow the Lectionary, the calendar of daily readings that enable all the mainline Christian denominations to follow the same pattern of readings that we cycle through every three years.

The acclamation of 'alleluia' before the Gospel reading again reflects a past tradition; as the Gospel was being brought to the raised lectern (ambo) for reading, a cantor would lead the people in the singing of a Psalm or Antiphon from the step (latin: gradus) of the ambo. So this gospel acclamation is called the 'Gradual'.

For us today it serves to underline the importance of the gospel, and for those whose attention drifts it calls us back to being attentive, standing for the gospel is also a part of this liturgical underlining.

Following the sermon, there is the traditional recitation of the Creed, and traditionally this would be the Nicene Creed which dates back to 325 and the Church Council at Nicaea; we choose to use various more contemporary creeds, which is an acknowledgement that our faith is always growing and evolving and is not locked up in some formula from the past.

The liturgy then provides for "The Prayers of the People", the intercessions; and in many churches these very often reflect a shopping list of things we ask God for; however if we believe that God has given everything then the only need for prayer in the context of the liturgy is "Thank You" and that is what we collectively engage in as "The Great Thanksgiving Prayer".

Rev'd Michael will soon be leading a series of four evenings to explore "Prayer" and this coming week we have an evening to share our thoughts and experiences of 'Prayer'.

We are now ready to prepare for communion, we have heard the word of God, in Scripture and sermon, and next we encounter God in the mystery of communion. It could be argued that at this point in the liturgy we move from a Protestant focus to a Catholic focus, and some might also see a cross over from left brain to right brain, but experientially we are very much still within a mystical space and seeking now to make manifest our participation in this mystery.

The 'Prayer of Approach', 'Confession' and 'Absolution' all follow the traditional liturgical pattern but we have brought a more contemporary understanding to the prayer book words which again reflect an out-of-date and more primitive appreciation of God and of humanity.

The 'greeting of peace' has in many respects been subject to the distortions of a sporting tradition; however it is not a half-time break, rather it is the ritual greeting of each other in light of our absolution and so an acknowledgement of our Divine wholeness.

The 'offertory' is the ritual of bringing up of our gifts, that which we offer to the altar, the bread and wine; in the Roman Rite, the term "preparation of the gifts" is used in addition to the term "offertory". It is an important symbolic movement to make manifest the offering of ourselves, the giving of ourselves into communion.

We have recently also included the offering, what used to be called the 'collection', to more fully appreciate the movement, and action of our giving. This action enables us to more fully appreciate the true nature of Church; rather than being an organisation of power that collects money from people, we are a gathering of those who give freely of themselves into the communion of the whole.

The great thanksgiving prayer deserves another sermon altogether, and we have again followed the tradition in respect to the components of the prayer, however we have also changed the words to give a more progressive and meaningful engagement with what we are actually encountering.

Overall our liturgy seeks to be a reflection of our own seeking, it seeks to bring us into a new reality of life, and a new reality that is revealed in and through Christ. We do not hold on to primitive understandings of a son of God who once and for all absolved sin so that the world is OK, rather we embrace the reality that the as children of God we have been shown in Christ to have a potential and a capacity to bring about a new creation, an enlightened humanity in which all are one.

There is a deep truth in our claim that “we are the Body of Christ”, however it is a claim of promise, a claim to be realised and a claim in which we each and all have a part to play.

Peter Humphris