

SUNDAY MORNING

"For the fully Christian life is a Eucharistic life: that is, a natural life conformed to the pattern of Jesus, given in its wholeness to God, laid on His altar as a sacrifice of love, and consecrated, transformed by His inpouring life, to be used to give life and food to other souls." –Evelyn Underhill

In the beginning...

When you arrive you may spot someone going to the baptismal font, dipping a hand in the blessed water, and making the sign of the cross. As with any time we make the sign of the cross, it is a way of recalling our baptism.

As you look around you'll see some sitting quietly or kneeling. They may be engaged in a form of contemplation; just being in God's presence. They may be reflecting on one of the readings that will be used today, or they may be saying a prayer used in preparing for the Eucharist. Others may be chatting, catching up with one another. Yes, the quiet reflecting and the chatting run up against each other!

There may be a few people toward the front, off to the left in the St. James transept, lighting a votive candle as they offer intercession.

You may sense the procession gathering in the back. A hymn begins, we stand (you can sit and watch if you want), and the procession moves forward. Many bow to the cross as it passes. A few may make a slight bow toward the presiding priest. It's all about understanding and showing reverence as God meets us in outward and visible forms – bread and wine, the cross, the altar, the priest, the Bible, and one another.

Readings and a sermon

God has a word for you.

Most members have learned over time that the most rewarding and authentic way to connect with the readings and the sermon is to do two

things. First, take an internal stance that "God has a word for me" and second, look and listen, don't read.



The quality of openness is central to both of these. Openness allows a renewed attention to what you're hearing, to what you're feeling, and to noticing what God may be doing in your life. Openness can help you see with fresh eyes what may have become stale or invisible: the person proclaiming the Word of God to you, in the readings, or in the sermon; the community around you in the pews; a familiar lesson may generate new reactions – perhaps the comforting becomes the challenging, or vice versa; you may find yourself thinking about something in your life, far from the worship service.

Like a dance

You'll notice a lot of physical movement – people making the sign of the cross, bowing toward the altar on entering a pew, and toward the cross as it enters in procession; then there's all the standing, sitting, and kneeling.

Sometimes, you'll experience silence and stillness (physical silence), perhaps punctuated by the rustling of a service leaflet, clanging steam pipes, or the siren on a passing ambulance.

Less noticeably, people are listening, looking, smelling (candles, flowers, occasionally incense), touching (others, bread and wine). There is often

a procession of those serving at the altar and musicians. In the liturgy, the whole person worships – body, soul, and mind.

In one of Screwtape's letters to Wormwood (C. S. Lewis' book of instructions from a senior to a junior devil), he says, "At the very least, they can be persuaded that the bodily position makes no difference to their prayers; for they constantly forget, what you must always remember, that they are animals and that whatever their bodies do affects their souls."

What we have come to understand about our spiritual life is that what we do physically affects our mind and our heart.

All these practices that people engage are ways to bring our whole self to the Eucharist. They allow us to pray with our bodies as well as our lips. In Christian spirituality, worship and prayer are not an activity just of the head or mind, but of the whole person. This is theologically grounded in the Incarnation. Traditional spiritual direction gives a lot of attention to helping gain some balance in the rhythm of sleeping, work, recreation, eating, and so on. It is also part of our affirmation of the goodness of the world God has created. Those things in life that give us pleasure are fundamentally good. Fun, our bodies, material things, and good food are all accepted as part of living a full life.

The use of our body allows us to say what we don't know how to say. "Worshipping Christ present in the Sacrament of the Eucharist is an experience so profound that words become inadequate and ceremonial gestures, such as the Sign of the Cross and genuflections, serve to express some of what we cannot put into speech." (Church of the Advent, Boston, website)

It's somewhat like dancing. It's not dancing if what we are doing is reading a book about dancing, or having a discussion about dancing, or even watching others dance. We are dancing when we give ourselves to the action, when our bodies are in motion. As in dancing, when we make a mistake in our practices during the Eucharist, we need to just rejoin

the action. Few things will ruin the dance more than obsessing about it when we miss a step.

Be Present, Participate, and Engage

You can't tell just by looking at people but there are three different ways in which they are joining in the Holy Eucharist: by just being present, by participating, and by engaging.

It's okay for you to simply be present. You can sit or stand and observe. You don't have to say the responses or join in the hymns. Allow the action and words to touch you. Allow the congregation to carry you in this act of praise and thanksgiving. The worship of God in the Eucharist is the reason we exist. We exist to participate in the life and glory of God and it is in the Eucharist that life is focused and actualized. Just being present is the act of humility each of us is called to. Because we give ourselves by being present, on occasion we receive the gift of being touched by deep joy, awe, and a sense of the harmony that exists within all things.

When you are ready you may want to participate. The starting place is to learn the sequence of the liturgy and the most common responses. Develop the habit of setting the book or bulletin aside and allow your attention to be on the liturgical action. Learn and experiment with some of the uses of the body in the Eucharist.

There are also ways of engaging at a deeper level. Because the purpose of the Eucharist is to worship God in union with the whole church and Christ the head of the church, these forms of engagement are secondary to simply being present and participating. Here are two examples. One tradition is to have a special intention in mind. Carry someone or a concern on your heart before God during the Eucharist and especially during the Offertory, as though you were laying it upon the altar, pouring it into the chalice. Another is to review the readings of the day before the Eucharist begins. That may be on arrival but could also be days in advance. Using a form of meditative reading may add to the experience. Focus on one of the readings. Find a phrase or word that touches you.

The Peace of the Lord

As we move closer to the Great Thanksgiving and communion we have a few minutes of frenzy as people lean toward others and hug or kiss or shake hands. Some get out of the pews and make that exchange with others. This is "The Peace" or the kiss of peace.

Exchanging "The Peace" is a formal liturgical act even if done in a very informal manner. We do it as a sign of mystical unity, of reconciliation, and love. It's not a time for conversation. That comes later.

Along with the Roman Catholics we tend to shake hands, hug, and occasionally kiss. The Orthodox kiss each other with a greeting such as "Christ is in our midst." Episcopalians say "The peace of the Lord be always with you." And respond "And also with you." As that spreads in the pews it's common for people to touch and simply say "Peace."

Receiving communion

The priest holds up the bread and chalice and says "The gifts of God for the People of God." Shortly after that people will begin moving forward to receive communion. This is the people's communion procession. We seek the energy of people coming forward as one Body, filling the aisle, rather than as a collection of individuals, going up in ones or twos.



As they leave their pews most will make some sign of reverence toward the Blessed Sacrament, the Body and Blood of Christ; most will make a slight or solemn bow and some will genuflect, getting down on one knee. As they come to the communion rail many will kneel and others stand. The most common and spiritually traditional way of receiving communion is to place one hand over the other so the bread can be placed in your hand and then you raise it to your mouth; take the base of the chalice in one hand and guide it to your lips. Some people leave the host (bread) in their hands and wait for the person administering the wine to come take it, intinct it slightly into the wine, and place it on their tongue. A few will receive only the bread. For reasons of spiritual life and community health it is inappropriate to attempt to dunk the host in the chalice yourself. Though if someone does it, it's usually tolerated.

People with limited mobility will stay in their seats and the clergy will bring communion to them.

After receiving communion people return to their pews. You may notice some stopping at the Mary shrine to light a candle. Once back in the pew some will kneel or sit and offer a brief prayer of thanksgiving ; others will enter into a brief time of reflective silence.

Coffee, tea, and community life

Many move from the Eucharist over to the parish hall for coffee or tea and a chance to be with others. Some have referred to coffee as the Episcopalian's 8th sacrament.

As you enter, you'll see a table with nametags available. It would be helpful if you'd put one on. That way when I forget your name within seconds of meeting you I'll have a reminder.

Some people will be in a line for coffee or tea, others at tables talking, and some milling about. Do what you want.

As with most parish communities, we are working on our hospitality. Those not wearing nametags or gathered at tables and involved in

intense conversation, aren't trying to ignore you. They are spending time with people they know and love.

It's a polarity: there are two good things, two expressions of Christian life we care about.

Community time with people we know <<<<--->>>> Hospitality to the visitor

Our tilt has been toward the loving community and time to catch up, support one another, and do a bit of gossiping. We're working on the hospitality part. You can help by finding the people with nametags on. They're not official greeters or anything like that. Just members who want to make it easier for the visitor to make a connection.

Robert A. Gallagher & Michelle Heyne, 2011