

## Before the Opening Hymn

So today we're going to be doing something a bit different- we'll be celebrating what is known as an Instructed Eucharist. We'll pause at various points to offer commentary and reflection. It has often been said that "praying shapes believing," so it is worthy of our time this morning to explore how our faith is being shaped by our prayer.

On Sundays, we see the importance of communal worship over individual prayer. Your individual daily prayers are important, but a communal aspect is needed. Recent studies have shown that more people are praying, but less people connected to a religious institution. There is a danger in this. If your spirituality is only about you and God, all you do in prayer is confirm your own suspicions about God. The value of being together, of praying together, of knowing God together is that we are challenged to see a bigger view of God. Theological growth takes place in conversation with each other. The Church is often called the Body of Christ; Sunday worship is about bringing the various parts together for intentional time together.

Our primary worship occurs on a Sunday- the Christian day of Sabbath. Sunday, the first day of the week, is the day that our Lord Jesus Christ rose from the grave- this is the focal point of our faith and it is for this reason that we come to church on Sunday.

I'm sure you've all heard the word "liturgy" before. Liturgy is a Greek compound word coming from the combination of *laos*, which means the people, and *ergos* which means work. So liturgy means "the work of the people," not "the work of the clergy." The clergy facilitate the service, but it is your work. Our prayers are no more valuable to God than yours. Speaking for myself, your singing

could easily be more pleasing to hear than mine. This notion of work is why there is so much activity by the laity. You stand, you sing, you kneel, you respond verbally. These actions might seem cumbersome, but they are a way to pray with our body, as well as our words and minds. Some of you help to lead the service by reading or administering the chalice or singing in the choir.

This is not a show, not a performance; this is worship- your worship, and your work. The Episcopal Church is more like the Smithsonian rather than the performance model found in megachurches- it takes more effort, is perhaps less fun, but we learn more about ourselves and our world. So keep that in mind throughout this, and every, service. Worship is not something you come to watch, it is your work; you lead it as much as anyone else.

As many of you know, the Episcopal Church's worship conforms to the 1979 Book of Common Prayer. It has a rich and interesting history which I won't go into now, but I'd encourage you to learn more about it. On my blog I'll have the text of this commentary along with a references section. What is useful to keep in mind is that the first Book of Common Prayer was written in 1549 and drew on many ancient resources. What is so tremendous about our liturgy is that it is so much bigger than any of us. The prayers that we pray have been prayed in the Book of Common Prayer for nearly 500 years, and are based on the most ancient prayers we know of. Furthermore, about 80% of the Prayer Book is either direct quotations or paraphrases of Scripture. Versions of the Prayer Book are used by 80 million Anglicans around the world every single day. The prayers we pray together are said by millions. And there is something beautiful and mystical in sharing those common words. This liturgy is real, not something that is here today

and gone tomorrow. The Prayer Book unites us, not only to those present, but those past and future as well.

Much could also be said about vestments and architecture, but in the interest of time, I'll leave these areas to be explored in the references list. But in a nutshell, both are reflections of the culture and are supposed to facilitate worship.

*So as our service began, you'll recall that we had an organ prelude. That is the beginning of the service, not the opening hymn. The prelude is a sort of call to worship, and invitation to stop the conversations with neighbors and prepare yourself for worship. There are some great prayers on page 833-4 of the Prayer Book that you might consider using.*

*We then have our opening hymn. We stand and sing together. Hymns have been a part of the entrance rite since the year 430. It was St. Augustine who said that "singing is praying twice." Hymns truly are prayer, just sung. So as you sing them, pay attention to the words and prayerfully sing them. This opening hymn is walking music, in the sense that music is crucial for any good parade, but also it symbolizes our movement towards the altar in prayer. We've come from different places and circumstances, but we all come here to journey towards the altar under the sign of the cross.*

*So let us stand together and pray our opening hymn.*

The Word of God (after hymn, before Blessed be God...)

The service continues with what is called the Liturgy of the Word, which balances with the Liturgy of Holy Communion later in the service. In the beginning of the service we focus on hearing God's word.

The opening sentences, “blessed be God...” recall Jewish blessings and have very ancient roots.

We then move to the Collect for Purity, which confesses that God intimately and intricately knows us. It is also a prayer of preparation for worship, asking God to cleanse us from all the stress and anxiety of the world so that when we enter those church doors, we might focus on worship and being spiritually fed. This prayer has its roots as a private prayer of preparation said by priests in the 11<sup>th</sup> century. It is based on Psalm 51 and the form we use today was composed in 1549.

What follows would normally be the *gloria* or song of praise. This element became common in the 11<sup>th</sup> century and reminds us that our primary focus here is to praise God. Today we’ve omitted it and a few other musical settings to give us more time for commentary.

The priest then says “the Lord be with you.” Which is really a prayer, hearkening back to Boaz’s greeting in the book of Ruth. The people return the prayer by saying “and also with you.” We then move into a prayer called the Collect of the day. The Collect is a prayer designed to collect the spirit of the day. Collects often come from medieval sources, some were written by the author of the 1549 Prayer Book, Thomas Cranmer. Collects have a regular formula- address God, say something about God’s nature, petition or thank God, conclude with Trinitarian doxology.

*At St. Francis we then dismiss the children to Children’s Chapel. We realize that hearing readings and a sermon targeted towards adults is not very entertaining for children. But beyond entertainment, it does not form or nourish their souls. We have crafted a Children’s Chapel service which mimics the order of*

*our service, but is designed with children in mind. So while we hear the readings and the sermon, the children are engaging in worship as well. And they return at the Peace so that all may gather around God's altar.*

Let us now commence with the Liturgy of the Word.

Readings (after Collect and children have left)

We use the Revised Common Lectionary. The pre-established cycle of readings is a helpful tool for at least two reasons. The first is that it is intentionally laid out so that in a three-year cycle, so that most of the Bible will be heard in that period. Secondly, it makes sure that nothing is left out by the preacher. The lectionary allows the Holy Spirit to be more involved and also further unites us; it also requires the preacher to think in a more critical way. We can't dodge the difficult issues, we must confront them, and that is a blessing of the lectionary. Many churches including the Lutherans, Presbyterians, many Methodists, Catholics and even some non-denominational churches use this same lectionary, so the lectionary is also unifying.

We read two selections from the Hebrew Bible, often called the Old Testament, one of which is a Psalm. The Psalm is sometimes called the Gradual because it was led by a cantor from the *gradus* or steps. The Psalter was the hymnal of ancient Israel, and as such was written to be sung, so we keep this custom here at St. Francis.

As we hear the readings, you are invited to hear them as Holy Scripture. As such, the reader concludes with "the Word of the Lord" and we respond by saying "thanks be to God" as a way to acknowledge the importance of what we just heard.

So now let us hear God's word.

### Gospel (after 2nd reading)

As we prepare for the Gospel reading, we should highlight the importance of this text. The Gospel is read from the midst of the people. The Gospel is the highlight of the Liturgy of the Word and symbolizes Christ's presence with us, mirroring how Christ is also present in the Eucharist. The sequence hymn is walking music that allows us to again process and pray as we move. Often this hymn is a repeating Alleluia chorus, but we use hymns here at St. Francis.

At the proclamation of the Gospel, you will notice some people cross themselves on their forehead, their lips and their heart to pray: Lord be in my mind, on my lips, and in my heart. May God be in my understanding, in my speaking, and in my feeling.

We now sing our sequence hymn, King of Glory.

### Sermon

Instead of offering a sermon today, we will have some more commentary. These are great readings today, I sort of wish I had the opportunity to preach on them. Ezekiel's vision is wonderful. It contains that great line, "I will feed them with justice." It preaches for itself. Then the Gospel is the wonderful passage where Jesus talks about the importance and mystery of serving God's glory through glorifying our brothers and sisters.

The sermon is the chance to comment and expand upon the readings, but is not a piece of performance talk, a pep talk or a lecture. Instead, the sermon is the wonderful intersection of pastoral care, Biblical study, academic research, prophetic witness, prayerful contemplation, and homiletical craft. Sermons are serious business, as they should strive to break open the Word of God so we can feast on it. Sometimes that feeding will nourish us, sometimes it will give us

indigestion, but it is food that we need. It has been required since the 1549 Prayer Book.

One area to explore in our discussion this morning that doesn't fit elsewhere is practices of piety, so let's address that briefly here. Piety is yours and yours alone. Don't do it for others or to fit in. There are several ways to show signs of piety. You can cross yourself, as a reminder of your Baptism, as an acknowledgement of the prayer, as a prayer for blessing, You can kneel, bow or genuflect to show reverence. Silence is important because it allows God to speak to us. Silence is not the chance to find the right place in your bulletin, nor is the time to check your watch, or phone or to think about your lunch plans- it is a time to be silent and commune with God. Finally, looking is important. Where you cast your eyes during the liturgy can be helpful, or distracting. Focusing on the cross might be helpful when reciting the Creed; looking at the Eucharistic elements during Communion is good; perhaps closing your eyes during the readings as well.

At the conclusion of the sermon, we stand with one voice and reaffirm our faith in the Nicene Creed. In the early church, there were struggles to define what was orthodox. The disagreements were about the nature and relationship of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit. It comes from the Council of Nicea in 325. So yes, it is dated, but it is still orthodox and has more history in it than you can shake a stick at. It has been common in liturgy since the 6<sup>th</sup> century. The Creed is an expression of faith, not the basis for faith; it is not a litmus test, and like any product of human minds and hands, it is not perfect, but it is rich in history and meaning.

One important thing to note is that in the Creed, we say "we believe," not "I believe." Maybe you can't buy into the Virgin Birth, but we, the Church, can. Maybe one Sunday the doubt is overshadowing faith, so we say the Creed on your

behalf, just as you say it for others at other times. St. Paul in Romans 10:17 writes that “faith comes from what is heard, and what is heard comes from preaching Christ.” Gathering and reminding ourselves of what we are about is important.

The Prayers of the People follow and they are one of the most ancient parts of the liturgy, dating back to at least the 2<sup>nd</sup> century. We pray for our world, for ourselves and for God’s Kingdom to come on earth as it is in heaven. In periods of silence, you are invited and encouraged to remember aloud and in your minds those for whom you would like to offer prayer. The prayers are led by a lay person and allow us to share in Christ’s “eternal priesthood” by interceding on behalf of others to God.

In most seasons of the Church year, the Confession follows. This is another response to God’s Word and our prayers. This is a fairly new portion of the liturgy, being introduced only during the Reformation period. Silence is reserved before we pray so that we can call to mind those things we will confess, so that it isn’t just a rote prayer.

We confess of sins of commission and omission- things done and left undone. Again, the language is “we” and not “I.” We pray for forgiveness of our corporate sins, not individual ones. It is okay to think about your personal ones too, but this is a public prayer. It might surprise you to know that we do have individual Confession in the Episcopal Church; talk to the clergy if you’d like to explore this sacred and healthy tradition.

Confession has two parts- identifying the sin and the intention to address it. Confession before Eucharist not only makes sense, but is a Biblical mandate. We must examine ourselves before taking Communion. It also allows the community to more fully gather around the altar.

In the Anglican Church, the clergy pronounces that God has forgiven; this differs from the Roman Catholic Church where the priest actually grants the absolution. It wasn't until the 1549 that an absolution was included, as it was assumed in taking Eucharist.

The Peace comes next. Though it seems like a meet and greet, it is not. It began with the kiss of peace, and has changed much since then. There is much debate over how far the peace extends. But one thing for certain, it is not meant as a time to say "your team had a rough game yesterday" or to finalize lunch plans. You are exchanging with your Christian brothers and sister the Peace of God- having heard God's word, prayed together, confessed your sins, you are now in good standing with each other.

If we did the Peace properly, you'd leave the church, go find the people you fought with this week, your estranged family members, you'd tell them that you're sorry, that you love them and you'd hug them and then come to gather around God's table with them. What we do is a small symbol of that intent. The theology here comes from Matthew 5:23-24- "if you are offering your gift at the altar, and there remember that your brother or sister has something against you, leave your gift there before the altar and go, first be reconciled to your brother or sister, and then come and offer your gift." Passing the peace is enacting this verse.

So now let us stand and reaffirm our faith in the words of the Nicene Creed.

Holy Communion (after offertory sentence, collection)

After the Welcome and Announcements, we transition to the second movement of the service, the Liturgy of the Table, or Holy Communion. The priest will say the Offertory sentence as an invitation to self-giving and table fellowship.

Again, there is work to do. Two things happen. The offertory plates are passed and you contribute financially to the church. This is important because it calls us all to give and helps us to go against materialism.

Secondly, we also bring forward the bread and wine, representing both ourselves and the earth. We don't bring up grapes and wheat, but bread and wine- things not only coming from God's creation, but also the products of human labor. We then say a doxology, giving God thanks for the many blessings bestowed upon us.

Also during this time, the clergy are preparing the table for Eucharist. Water is added to the wine to both reduce the strength of the wine, but also to symbolize the water that poured out of Jesus side at his crucifixion. This is the splendor of liturgy- it has both practical and theological elements. This is true in candles which provided light before electricity and the washing of the priest's hand before Eucharist. These all of theological meanings, but their origins are in the practical matters of having clean hands and being able to see properly.

So now we offer to God ourselves and prepare for Communion.

Great Thanksgiving (after doxology, before *sursum corda*)

The Eucharist, or Great Thanksgiving, or Holy Communion then begins. Eucharist is a word which means "good thanks." The Eucharist is the emphasis of the service.

There are four Eucharistic prayers in the Book of Common Prayer, and even more in the supplements. Prayer A tries to maintain as much of the original 1549 Cranmer language in a modern setting. Prayer B is based on the 3<sup>rd</sup> century prayer of Apostolic Tradition by Hippolytus. Prayer C is a contemporary composition

written for this prayer book. Prayer D is the most ecumenical, based on the 4<sup>th</sup> century prayer by St. Basil, a major figure in Orthodox churches.

There are many ways to interpret what the Eucharist is-

- Table fellowship- the sharing of a meal as Jesus did with others.
- Grounding in Jesus' ministry- as a way to remember the Gospel.
- Invocation of the Spirit- as a way to call and be aware of God's presence.
- Blessing itself- something to nourish us.
- Foretaste of the heavenly banquet- getting a glimpse of what we look forward to.
- But it is NOT reenactment, the Last Supper happened once and for all. We might recall it to mind, but we're not doing it again; this is not a play. In the Roman church the priest is seen as the *alter Christus*, not so for us- and thank God. I am not worthy to stand in for Christ, I am not taking his place in the Eucharist.

The Eucharist begins with what is called the *sursum corda*, which is Latin for lift up your hearts. We have evidence of this language being used as far back as the 2<sup>nd</sup> century. It is also a dialogue, you all respond. The priest can't do it alone, you can't do this alone- we do it together. We talk about lifting up- we seeking to be brought into Christ's presence, not to bring Christ to us. We are trying to transcend this world to reflect the divine liturgy going on in heaven.

We then say or sing the *sanctus*, which is the "holy, holy, holy." Here, we really get the sense that this is bigger than us here at St. Francis as we join in the song of the angels, archangels and the faithful throughout the ages and around

the world. The *sanctus*, which means holy, is a conflation of songs from Isaiah and Revelation.

So now let us stand as we begin the Eucharistic celebration.

Great Thanksgiving (after *sanctus*)

Since the Eucharist is the focus of our worship, the culmination of Word and Sacrament, we should spend some time reflecting on it.

There is a fourfold action in the Eucharist, inspired by Jesus' actions at the Last Supper. Watch for the times during the prayer where these actions occur.

1. The bread is **TAKEN**
2. **THANKS** are given as the bread is blessed
3. The bread is **BROKEN** so that it can be shared
4. And finally, the bread is **GIVEN** so that it may feed others.

This fourfold action also symbolizes the story of the Passion of Jesus.

There are many things that happen in the prayer, and I'll briefly point them out so that you can notice them during the prayer:

The prayers often begin with a salvation narrative, telling the story of God's working since Creation.

We then have what is called the Words of Institution, which is the retelling of the Last Supper. This is an ancient part of the liturgy and reminds us of why we gather at the table, because of the command to "do this in remembrance of me." This phrase calls us to remember, and is often called the anamnesis. It is the opposite of amnesia, where we forget. We call to mind and pray that Christ is present among us. These words were commonplace by the 4<sup>th</sup> century.

There is the Memorial Acclamation, where the people respond faithfully by saying that Christ died, was risen, and will continue to come again.

In the Oblation, we offer our gifts to God. The wording today is “we offer you these gifts.”

Then comes the epiclesis, which is the calling of the Holy Spirit to bless the elements. This prayer is a function of ordination; priests have been set apart for this task. We don't have magic hands; but we do have special duties and have been ordained for this task, just as you all have been called to serve God in your vocations. It is a prayer for the Father to send the Holy Spirit upon these gifts to enable the Son to interpenetrate them so that they are for us the body and blood of Christ. The *epiclesis* dates back at least to the year 215 and is likely oldest part of the Eucharistic liturgy. These gifts become a means for our own transformation.

Of course, there is the debate around substance- that is, how do we understand Christ's presence. Rome espouses transubstantiation, that the elements literally, not symbolically, become flesh and blood. That is not the Episcopal position. Other theories are consubstantiation- that somehow the elements are body and blood, but within the substance of bread and wine. There is Pneumatic Presence, where it is a spiritual and symbolic change. There is Memorialism, which stresses that it's about remembering Christ, but nothing magical happens. And there are the pragmatists that claim it's just bread and wine, but that the true glory is in the people that gather together to share a meal together. But as I said, these are theories. Bottom line is that it's a mystery and each interpretation likely has a bit of the truth in it.

We then conclude with the doxology, giving God glory, honor and thanksgiving.

What comes next is extremely important and is called the Great Amen. Amen means, “so be it” in Hebrew or “ditto” in colloquial speech. So when you say “amen,” you’re assenting to what has happened. This Amen is your work, not mine; I’ll never say it. I then bow, to both acknowledge Christ’s presence among us, and also to acknowledge your “Amen.” Early church theologians said that the Great Amen is of the utmost importance in the liturgy.

The Lord’s Prayer then follows the climax of the Amen, it binds us together as we pray these words that Jesus taught us.

We then have the Fraction, where we break the bread, symbolizing that Christ’s body was broken for us. But Christ was broken once, we are not re-breaking it. Language of the Passover is important here. We celebrate the Passover of the Exodus and Christ’s victory over the grave in our acclamation. Alleluia comes from the Hebrew word, pronounced the same way, and means “praise to God.” It is a superlative expression of simultaneous thanksgiving, joy, and triumph. It reminds us that there is victory and grace in being broken.

It is then time to receive communion. Communion is to be done prayerfully and intentionally. As our instructions on page 10 of the bulletin note, you can receive Communion in many ways. And for the curious, studies have shown that the higher alcohol content of the port wine we use, coupled with the use of a purificator to wipe the rim of the chalice are actually quite hygienic practices. When I distribute communion and say “the Body of Christ, the bread of Heaven,” I use those words to pray for you; I trust that you too are prayerfully and thankfully receiving the gift of the Eucharist.

Another debate around communion is around who gets to receive it. The Prayer Book is very clear that Communion is reserved only for baptized Christians, with no exceptions. Many Episcopal Churches though have chosen to not follow this rule. Both sides have very valid arguments regarding who Communion is open to and the Church will need to do some serious discernment to decide the best way forward.

It brings us to the larger point though of common prayer standing in the way of local customs which make sense. You might notice that the beginning of our service, we've changed it from "and blessed be *his* Kingdom" to "and bless be *God's* Kingdom. The shift is subtle, but real. The decision that was made here, and at most Episcopal churches, is that in this case, there is no reason to use the gendered language when using the word God would suffice.

But the question remains, at what point does our commitment to common prayer lead us to do something uncommon, and what price are we willing to pay to make these changes? I have no answer; I think it depends largely in the context and that any changes to the common prayer need to be done intentionally, communally, and of course, with the Bishop's permission. The debate over Open versus Closed Communion is the same. I can argue effectively for either position, and both positions are valid. At St. Francis, the decision has leaned towards open inclusivity; and there is a cost for that, but it is worth the price.

After receiving Eucharist, you return to your pew. You may pray, you may contemplate on the Eucharist, or you may join the choir in singing communion hymns, which again, is a great way to continue praying.

As we get ready to continue the Eucharist, we reverence God by kneeling for the duration of the Eucharist Prayer when it is seasonally appropriate.

Kneeling, though, is a fairly recent addition to the liturgy. The ancient posture for prayer was standing, and still is in the Eastern Church. Standing was assumed in the 1549 Prayer Book. We kneel though as a sign of devotion symbolizing humility and penitence, which make sense in the Eucharistic narrative. Of course, if kneeling is painful for you, please feel free to sit.

So now let us kneel and continue the Great Thanksgiving.

Post-Communion Prayer (before sending of LEV)

After Communion, we sometimes commission parishioners to take Eucharist from this celebration to some of our parishioners who cannot be here with us due a variety of reasons. They go to peoples' homes or hospital rooms to celebrate a service and visit with them. They receive Communion, being reminded of the community's and God's care and love for them.

We then will pray the Post-Communion Prayer. In the early church, you just left after Communion. But as church got bigger and more formal, it needed a real ending. So we summarize what has happened in the service and pray for God's continual guidance and grace in our lives.

The priest then pronounces a blessing over the people. This practice started in Egypt around the 4<sup>th</sup> century. It was intended to be like a laying on of hands to people. Some Eastern liturgies still maintain this by actually laying hands on each person before they leave. Again, the priest isn't blessing you, but is asking God to do this. You can be a blessing to others that you encounter in the world as well, but only the priest pronounces the sacramental blessing.

We have a final hymn, as we began with one voice, we end with one voice and process out into the world, having glorified God and being nourished by and filled with God's spirit for doing the work of the Gospel in our world.

Instructed Eucharist  
Robert Black  
November 20, 2011

Don't leave too early, or you'll miss the dismissal. This is the chance to be commissioned to go out into the world, to take the ideas of Peace and Eucharist with you in to the world.

After the dismissal we have a postlude, it another chance to sit and pray before leaving to face the perils of this world.

I hope that this Instructed Eucharist has been helpful and educational, and that it will allow us to more deeply engage in and do the work of liturgy. We will now conclude our service.

Resources:

Catechism in the 1979 Book of Common Prayer, page 845.

*Liturgical Life Principles* by Ian Markham, Morehouse Publishing, 2009.

*Welcome To Sunday* by Christopher Webber, Morehouse Publishing, 2002.

*Praying Shapes Believing* by Leonel Mitchell, Morehouse Publishing, 1991.

Academic Resources:

*Commentary on the American Prayer Book* by Marion Hatchett, HarperOne, 1995.

*Celebrating the Eucharist* by Patrick Malloy, Church Publishing, 2007.

*Opening the Prayer Book* by Jeffery Lee, Cowley Publications, 1999.

*The Shape of Liturgy* by Gregory Dix, Continuum, 1945.

*Elements of Rite* by Aidan Kavanagh, Pueblo Publishing, 1982.