

THE SACRAMENT OF THE LORD'S SUPPER (THE EUCHARIST)

From New Testament times the celebration of the Eucharist on the Lord's Day has been the norm of Christian worship. The Eucharist was instituted by Christ himself. From the church's inception, the Lord's Day and the Lord's Supper were joined. Along with the reading and proclamation of scripture, the Eucharist gives witness to God's redemptive acts, giving Christian worship its distinctive shape.

In this sacrament, the bread and cup, the words and actions, make the promises of God visible and concrete. In the Eucharist the church blesses God for all that God has done, is doing, and promises to do, and offers itself in obedient service to God's reign. The Lord's Supper is more than a reminder of Christ's sacrificial death and resurrection. It is a means, given to us by Christ, through which the risen Lord is truly present and a continuing power and reality. While the meaning of Christ's sacrificial death is at the heart of the sacrament, it is the resurrected, living Christ whom we encounter in the bread and cup. The overall tenor of the celebration should be one of joy.

The basic order for the Eucharist is as follows:

Invitation. Using suitable words from scripture, the minister invites the people to the Lord's table. All baptized believers, of any denomination, are welcome to participate in the Sacrament.

Great Thanksgiving. This prayer of thankful praise has been central very early centuries in Christian worship. God is praised for all God's mighty acts in the past, present, and future. Christ's work of redemption is recalled with thanks. The Holy Spirit is called upon to make the breaking of the bread and sharing of the cup to be a true communion of the body and blood of Christ. The prayer concludes with an ascription of praise to the triune God, and is followed by the Lord's Prayer.

Words of Institution. These words, provided in scripture, are spoken by the minister either as part of the Great Thanksgiving or separately. The minister takes the bread and breaks it, and lifts the cup of salvation in full view of the people.

Communion of the People. The bread and cup from the table are served to the people in a manner suitable to the occasion. During the serving, the people may sing psalms, hymns, spirituals, or the choir may sing, or instrumental or organ music may be played.

Prayer. A closing prayer is offered thanking God for the gift of Christ in the Sacrament and asking for God's grace and strength to be faithful disciples.