

AN INSTRUCTED EUCHARIST

(Before the service begins, the priest will announce what will take place.)

Good morning and welcome to this time of worship at St. Martha's. Each week, on Sunday morning, we gather together in this place to worship God through our service of Holy Eucharist. Why do we do this? What do these actions and these words, so faithfully and regularly committed, really mean and signify?

To help us all to reflect upon the meaning of worship, in the hopes that our regular participation in the worship of this praying community may be enriched and strengthened, we will take time today, during our service, to reflect on what it is that we do when we come together to worship. This has traditionally been called an "Instructed Eucharist", but it is a probably more appropriately called a Eucharist with a commentary, or a "Guided Eucharist." First and foremost we gather, as we do every Sunday, to worship God, but today, we will pause at the natural divisions of the Eucharist to take just a few minutes to consider what it is that we are doing, and what it is that makes up this central act of Christian worship. If you have any questions during any of these descriptive times, please feel free to ask them.

We are here first and foremost to worship – and specifically to worship God. To worship is to lift our hearts and minds to God. It is to turn our faces toward the Divine which we have encountered in our lives and supremely in the life of Jesus Christ. In a word, the whole of the Eucharist is a proclamation and a thanksgiving for the life, death and resurrection of our Lord, Jesus Christ. This means that all that we do is to enable us to offer our praise and thanksgiving to God. The way we enter the church, the way we interact with one another, the words we use, the symbols we choose and the music we share has chiefly one purpose - to worship God.

As our prayer book reminds us (on page 13), "The Holy Eucharist is the principal act of Christian worship on the Lord's Day and other major feasts." The term "Eucharist" means "to give thanks"-- it is our foremost proper response to the gift of the love of Christ Jesus in our lives. It is also the pattern for what all of Christian life is about. We are here gathered to offer praise, hear the Christian story (which is our story), offer prayer and confession, and having sealed this gathering with the ancient custom of the passing of the peace, we "make Eucharist" by offering of the gifts we have been given, giving thanks for them, breaking them to be shared, and then feasting upon Christ's presence among us. Then, so strengthened, we are sent out to be as Jesus is and to do as Jesus does in the world. Love received is love to be shared, and this is the way we as Christians give thanks, or "make Eucharist."

Yet, we do this not in a careless or haphazard manner, but deliberately, reverently, and most importantly, in communion with the Church Universal. To participate in the Eucharist is not a private affair. Technically, we as members of the congregation do not "hear" Mass -- we **do** it, or "assist" by our participation. The words of St. Clement of Rome (from a letter written in 96 A.D.) are passed on to us in our Prayer Book (again on page 13) in this way!

"In all services, the entire Christian assembly participates in such a way that the members of each order within the Church, lay persons, bishops, priests, and deacons, fulfill the functions proper to their respective orders"

Each of us has a special "liturgy" (or "action in the worship"). In fact, it is not permissible for the priest to celebrate alone. In fact – all of us act on behalf of others: the priest, the deacon, when one is serving in a congregation, and you – as representatives of all who can not, for whatever reason, join us today. It is good to remember that the actions of the leaders are only offered on behalf of everyone, and the power of those actions depends upon our prayerful support of the liturgy. Responses given by the congregation must be zealous and joyful or the entire service falls flat.

The shape of the Eucharist is established by tradition. The service falls primarily into two parts: the ministry of the word and the ministry of the table. The first half of the service, the Liturgy of the Word, is based upon the Jewish tradition of gathering for prayer, listening to Holy Scripture, and singing of psalms. The apostles and early followers of Jesus gathered for prayer in the Temple or in their local synagogues and their services were similar to what we know as the Liturgy of the Word. The second half, the Liturgy of the Table, is based upon the sharing of a meal, the breaking of bread, originally done in people's homes on the Sabbath, in obedience to Christ's command that we remember him in this way.

Justin Martyr writes this account of the worship of Christians in the year 155 A.D.:

"On the day called Sunday, all meet in one place ... and the memoirs of the apostles or the writings of the prophets are read as time permits. Then the president, in a discourse, urges/invites us to the imitation of these noble things. Then, we stand up together and offer prayers. And, when we have finished the prayers, we greet one another with the kiss of peace. Then, bread is brought and wine and water, and the president offers prayers to the best of his ability on our behalf."

The words and some of the trappings have changed over the years, but this basic form has remained. How exciting it is to consider that each Sunday we are offering this worship in communion with the Church Universal, throughout the world and throughout time, joining our voices with all the saints whose prayers support us continuously!

Let me take this opportunity to also talk about music. Music in worship is chiefly a vehicle of our devotion, a means through which we proclaim our love for God. That is why even when we are listening to a prelude or postlude or an anthem or soloist that time is time for us to allow our own hearts be lifted to God through the music being offered. That is why it is customary not to clap for musicians or choirs because we are not passive spectators, but participants through our own response to this vehicle of worship. Music is the place where perhaps we are touched most personally. For in the poetry and cadence of music we enter into worship, not only with our minds, but indeed with our emotions and

our whole physical being. A hymn sung with joy and vigour is quite literally, soul-stirring, and is for many people one of the most significant dimensions of worship.

Our worship begins with the Gathering of the Community. We gather as Christians from many different walks of life as a people of God to worship together. This part of the service brings us together, and builds our common bonds as members of the Body of Christ. Our gathering, in a very real way, creates the Church in this place at this moment, as we gather in Christ's name. The opening procession is led usually by the Cross of Christ.

We rise for hymns of praise, remain standing for the opening acclamation which is an ancient Christian greeting from St. Paul's epistles. We continue with the familiar prayer known as the Collect for Purity. This prayer has been used for about 800 years in the British Isles, and it has been in every Book of Common Prayer since Thomas Cranmer put out the first edition in 1549. This expresses our desire to be honest with God, that our desire for God may be purified of all selfishness by the power of the Holy Spirit. It is based upon Psalm 51.

We then sing or say one or more of three opening canticles: the Kyrie, the Gloria, or the Trisagion. The Kyrie Eleison (Greek for "Lord have mercy upon us," originally a chant from street crowds to passing royalty) is most often used on penitential occasions. The Gloria, taken from the Gospel account of the song of the angels at Jesus' birth, is customarily used for festive occasions. The Trisagion ("Holy God, Holy and Mighty, Holy Immortal One") comes from the Eastern Orthodox tradition.

The Ministry of the Word then opens with the Collect of the Day which is a special prayer for each Sunday, which focuses our thoughts and hearts on the themes of the Scriptures and prepares us to receive God who is made present to us in Word and in Sacrament. (Some of these collects are modern, others are from the time of the Reformation, and still others are rooted in the ancient liturgies of the Church).

Before we continue are there any questions? Let us stand and sing together Hymn #

{Opening Hymn, opening sequence, through the Collect of the Day.

[Before O.T. Reading]

Please be seated. That prayer, the "Collect of the Day," reflects a custom dating from the 5th Century in Egyptian Christian monasteries, whereby after a time of offering petitions at morning prayers, the concerns expressed by the brethren were "collected" by the Abbot into one final prayer. Each week this prayer reflects the concerns and themes of the lessons which are to follow.

This next part of the service, the "Ministry of the Word" focuses on the reading of Scripture and reflection upon it by all the faithful. A moment of silence is appropriately observed after each reading so that we might indeed inwardly digest what we have heard. There are actually four readings from Scripture: We begin with a reading from one of the books of the Old Testament which were, of course, the first Christian Scriptures. The Hebrew Scripture roots the Christian proclamation in the story of salvation of God's Chosen People.

This is followed by a Psalm, which is both a Biblical reading and an ancient hymn. The Psalms, in many ways, are a devotional distillation of the Biblical tradition and often echo the themes of the other readings. Psalms may be sung as hymns, read together or said responsively. Here we often say them responsively by half-verse.

Next, we hear a lesson from the New Testament called the "Epistle" -- a word meaning "letter," as most often it is a reading from one of the letters of St. Paul or other early Church writers. These are the earliest Christian writings and are letters of instruction, encouragement and reflection about Christian faith and practise. The Apostles wrote to instruct the young churches in the faith of Christ and to help resolve conflicts and controversies in their midst. We can learn a great deal about how to put Christian love into action by listening to the Epistle readings.

After the Epistle, we customarily sing a hymn to prepare ourselves for the Gospel, the reading from one of the four accounts of the life of Jesus in our Scriptures. The Gospel is read from the nave (where the congregation is standing) customarily by the deacon, whose ministry of servant hood "represents" the ministry of each of us to proclaim the story of Jesus in the midst of the world. In the absence of a deacon, the priest (who is also ordained as a deacon) reads the Gospel. We all rise to hear the Gospel to demonstrate our unity and our readiness to carry the Word out into the world to proclaim it daily through our daily activities. As a sign of our thankfulness for and response to the gospel, we say the responses before and after it is read. For hundreds of years, people have made the sign of the cross on their forehead, lips and heart, just before the Gospel is read. This signifies our desire to think about Christ, speak in His Spirit and allow his love to transform our hearts. The Gospel is followed immediately by the sermon. As we shall break the bread of the Eucharist, so we must break open the words of Scripture so that we might take it into our lives. The sermon should ideally, draw out the themes of the daily readings and assist us to consider them in our own lives

Any questions? Let us listen now, for the Word of God in the Scriptures.

{The Lessons are now read}

[After the gospel]

The sermon follows here as a means of encouraging all present to reflect upon the connection between the story told in scripture and our own personal stories or lives ... as Justin Martyr put it: "to urge and invite us to the imitation of these noble things." As this instructed Eucharist is really the sermon for today, we will move on to the next part of the service.

Following the sermon, we respond to the proclamation of the Word by affirming our faith in the words of a creed. We use one of two: the Nicene Creed, a creed of the fourth century, which upholds the central elements of Christian Faith; and the Apostle's Creed, which is an expansion of an ancient baptismal creed reminding us of our promises made in baptism. The difference is clearly seen by the opening words, "We believe..." or "I believe..." Again we are reminded that participation in the Eucharist is not a private action, but something we do in a profound way **together**.

The Creed is intended as a summary of Scripture, a brief statement of what we as the Church believe together. The Creed is not intended as a "last word" about what we believe, but as a first word -- that in hearing many tenets of our faith all together, we may be recalled to the fullness of our faith. At least since the time of the first Anglican Prayer Books in the 16th century, the creeds have been optional - included where an affirmation of faith is especially appropriate and omitted where not essential to the circumstances of the day. Practise, however, has evolved so that the Creed is in fact seldom omitted.

The Word having been proclaimed and responded to, now we are moved to offer prayer. These "Prayers of the People" are led, appropriately, by a lay person. Prayer is one of the vital tasks of the church, and we share in that together as a worshipping community. We bring before God our concerns and hopes for the Church, for all who carry the burden of responsibility in government and industry, for the world, for our own community, for those in need, and for those who have died. Spaces of silence are often appropriately left, in which opportunity is given for any to offer specific prayers, either silently or aloud. Our lives are closely linked in Christ, and the power of prayer is real. When you pray for others, do so only in-so-far as you are prepared to be an instrument which God may use in responding to that prayer. Prayer is not to change God's mind about whether He will help us, as much as to change us so that we may accept and respond to God's calling to us to act on His behalf in the world. It is understood that we will continue to pray, each of us personally, daily throughout the week to come.

After the "Prayers of the People," the deacon (or priest) calls us to confession of our sins. It is traditional to kneel for the prayer of confession, but standing is also acceptable. It is only by honestly confronting our personal brokenness and sin that we can be freed from it. Also, in confession, we celebrate our faith in God's mercy and power to change us. Confession is the act of offering our inmost wounds to God for healing, and the priest's statement of absolution which follows assures us that God's greatest joy is to forgive and free us from that sin. The "general" confession which is part of our worship each week, however, is just the beginning of the work of reconciliation for the penitent. In our tradition there is also the sacrament of confession or reconciliation -- clergy are available to hear confession privately, in strict confidence. If you have questions about this, you should approach a member of the clergy.

Having faced the reality of our own shortcomings, and received the assurance of God's care for us, we stand as a new people, renewed in Christ, to exchange the Peace with one another. This reminds us that for our Christian lives to be complete, we must also make peace with one another. While the Peace has only recently been reintroduced into the worship of the Episcopal Church, it is one of the most ancient, traditional, and universal of all Eucharistic actions. St. Paul refers to this custom as he writes in Romans: "Greet one another with a holy kiss." It is offered at this time in the service, as St. John Chrysostom explained in the 4th Century, as a sign of reconciliation before the offering. In the Gospel according to Matthew, Jesus is recorded as saying:

"If you are offering a gift at the altar, and there remember that your brother has something against you, leave there your offering on the altar and go first and be reconciled to your brother, and then come near and offer your gift."

The Peace is not a time for idle chatter, but it is a prayerful act, to be offered reflecting upon the profound miracle of our unity in Christ. Such an action also reminds us that as Christians we are instruments of Christ's peace for one another and the world. Greet one another in a manner with which you are comfortable. It is also a fitting time to welcome newcomers and visitors.

Before we continue – are there any questions?

Now we continue the service by affirming our faith through the words of the Nicene Creed:

{Here follows the Creed, Prayers, Confession, and Peace.}

Now we begin the second part of the service: Holy Communion, or Eucharist. First, a few words about the name Holy Eucharist. Holy means sacred – belonging to God. It also means special, set apart, deserving special respect. Eucharist comes from the Greek word meaning grateful or thankful. Sometimes the Holy Eucharist is called the Great Thanksgiving (see page 361 in the Book of Common Prayer.) It is a good reminder that our worship should ideally be a balance between reverence and joyful participation.

The action of the Holy Eucharist is four-fold, based upon the sequence common to the description of all sacred meals shared by Jesus and His disciples as recorded in Scripture: From Matthew:

"Now as they were eating, Jesus took bread, blessed, and broke it, and gave it to the disciples."

These, then, are the four actions: we **take** the bread and wine in the Offertory. We **ble**ss it (or give thanks for it) in the Prayer of Consecration. We **break** the bread at the Fraction. And then we **share** it with one another at the communion rail. Yet, we must remember that the bread and wine symbolize our own body and blood as well as Christ's. As the bread and wine are presented to the altar, so we offer to God ourselves, our souls and bodies -- that which is most treasured by each of us: our talents, daily work, families' lives, our hopes and dreams as well as our hurts and fears. As Christ was taken and His Body broken on the Cross to reveal God's Love for us, so in this service we are taken, blessed, transformed, and fed or strengthened to be sent out into the world to serve in God's Name.

The celebration of the Eucharist, the Great Thanksgiving for the life, death and resurrection of Jesus, begins with the Offertory. The offertory is a multifaceted event, which is often thought of simply as the collection of money for the work of the Church; but it is much more. The offertory is a preparation for the Eucharist. At this point in the service we prepare the Holy Table for the sacred banquet. And we take very ordinary things of life, Bread and Wine - symbols of basic nourishment, symbols of the gifts of the earth, and symbols of the work of human hands - and we bring them to the table. In the early Church, each family brought bread they had baked to be offered that day. They also brought wine and poured it into a common vessel. (One can imagine the strange combinations of wine which must have resulted!) These gifts were brought forward at

the offertory usually by an honored guest, such as a community leader or elder. Here, members of the congregation who represent the life of the community share in that task to honor the holiness of all our members. During the offertory we also present gifts of money, a powerful symbol in our culture of who we are and where we place our priorities in life. These symbols of our life's work show our support for the Church's ministry and mission. And in all this we offer ourselves, our prayers, our repentance, and our commitment to be God's people. All these are taken together and offered to God for Christ's use in our time. Jesus began by taking the loaf off the table. His work now, in us and through us, cannot start until the ordinary material of our lives, just as it is, is turned over entirely to him.

The deacon, or Lay Eucharistic Minister, receives the bread and wine as the priest prepares the table. It is very appropriate when a deacon is present for the deacon to prepare the table. The Lay Eucharistic minister(s) is/are also at the altar, representing the presence of the whole congregation gathered around the table. This completes the first action, or Offertory.

The second act in this sacred drama is that from which we take the title "Eucharist" or Thanksgiving – thus the title "The Great Thanksgiving." It is an act of blessing, of thanksgiving, in which we thank God for all the gifts of creation and above all for our re-creation and redemption through Christ's death and resurrection. For centuries, this prayer was offered ex-temporaneously, the celebrant having no prepared text. The prayer begins with a dialogue between the priest and the people. This dialogue (the "sursum Corda") consists basically of the congregation giving the priest permission to pray on their behalf. The priest says, "Let us give thanks to the Lord, our God," and the people respond, "It is meet and right so to do," or "It is right to give Him/God thanks and praise." The culmination of this dialogue is the Sanctus "Holy, Holy, Holy," recalling the vision of Isaiah in the Temple in Isaiah 6. The "Benedictus" which follows ("Blessed is He who comes in the name of the Lord") recalls the chanting of the crowds as Jesus entered Jerusalem on Palm Sunday.

In the prayer which follows, the priest gives thanks for God's work throughout History. The Last Supper is recalled with the "words of Institution" ("On the night before He died he took bread ... and said: "This is my Body ..." "Do this in remembrance of me"). These words, taken directly from Scripture, are considered the most profound moment of the prayer, although the consecration is effected by the entire prayer, not just by these words alone. Then, the Spirit is invoked to sanctify these gifts, and also the entire congregation.

We become a part of this story and these gifts by our participation. At certain points in the prayer, the congregation joins voices with the celebrant. This happens first at the Sanctus. This ancient hymn is based upon the song of the angels in the prophet Isaiah's vision, (Isaiah 6). The people also add their voices in the acclamation of the mystery of faith in the midst of the prayer, and at the Great Amen at the end. The Hebrew word Amen means "so be it." In the great Amen we proclaim a resounding "yes" to all that has been prayed in the Great Thanksgiving. The "Amen" at the end of our prayer of consecration is the affirmation of praise that concludes this whole act of blessing. It is the seal by which each one of us say, "So be it, Lord; take and consecrate me to your service".

Listen closely to the words of this prayer and offer them with the priest. It is your prayer.

Having offered the bread and wine and having given thanks for all we are, and all we will become, we now proclaim our identity as the family of God by offering the prayer which Christ himself taught us. Only now are we bold enough to pray, "**Our** Father." The Lord's Prayer, which is the only recorded prayer Jesus taught his disciples, concludes the prayer of thanksgiving.

The third act of our drama is the Breaking of Bread. Here we behold the mystery of God. For redemption to occur Christ's body was broken and his blood poured out. Here is the mystery of life arising out of death; here is the paradox of self-giving, self-sacrifice, so that new life can be given. As Christ's Body was broken on the Cross for us, and as we recognize the brokenness in our own lives (personally and as families, communities, even as a nation), so the bread is broken. We are reminded of those who hunger even as we are fed. We are reminded of our ministry to act to heal that brokenness. But we also give thanks at this moment that in the breaking, there is transformation.

The final act of Eucharist is the giving – for what is taken, blessed and broken, is now given for the life of the whole world. Sharing in the one bread, we are recreated as the Body of Christ. The moment of climax is at once most personal and also most shared, as each of us individually takes by faith the Life we can only know together as a Body. We are made new and strengthened by this holy meal. As we receive the Body and Blood of Christ, we become the Body and Blood of Christ, His hands and feet, acting with Him daily by the way we live our lives. It is said that at this moment in the liturgy, St. Augustine once elevated the now consecrated Body of Christ, and said: "There are you on the table; there are you in the chalice."

As you receive communion, you may stand or kneel. (Both positions are traditional.) And when you have received, respond with a firm "Amen!" declaring your readiness to respond to His Grace by offering your whole life to His service.

Before we continue, are there any questions? Please stand.

"Let us walk in Love as Christ loves us and gave himself for us – an offering and a sacrifice to God"

{Here follows the Offertory, the Eucharistic Prayer, Lord's Prayer and Communion}

(Before thanksgiving prayer)

Having received communion, the priest disposes of all consecrated elements in a reverent fashion, and we now turn our hearts and minds toward leaving.

In the closing prayer, we ask that we might be sent out into the world in peace, to love and serve the Lord with gladness and singleness of heart. All that remains is for us to go into the world as Christ's Body, having celebrated our new life in him, or to put it another way, his life now received into our own. We thank God for having renewed us as the Body of Christ, and given us a pledge of his coming reign, and we pray that we might now go on, and out, in the strength of this unity. The sharing of Bread, concluded now

sacramentally, must be continued in all aspects of our lives and so has significant implications personally, socially, and politically. St. Augustine once more, "Receive therefore and eat the Body of Christ, you who are already made members of Christ within the Body of Christ. Take and drink the Blood of Christ. Lest you should fall apart, drink that which binds you together. Lest you should seem cheap to yourselves, drink that which bought you. As this, when you eat and drink it, is changed into you, so you are changed into the Body of Christ by an obedient and holy life. You are receiving that which (unless you receive unworthily) you have begun to be..."

The priest assures us once more of God's abiding love and guidance in the blessing, and the deacon dismisses us with the words: "Go in peace, to love and serve the Lord." Our response is always: "**THANKS BE TO GOD!**" for this is the prayerful response of God's people to God's great love for us.

And so our dismissal is the end of our celebration, but the renewing of our mission to live in the world as Christ's people.

{Here follows the Post Communion Prayer, Blessings and Announcements and Dismissal}