A walkthrough of the Eucharist

At the Chapel at Churchill, 15 June 2025

Written by Nigel Cooper, chaplain

Exodus 16.9-15

Matthew 26.17-19, 26-29

On this Sunday, which was Trinity Sunday, we held a service of Holy Communion* according to the Church of England's rite in Common Worship. The text of the service is appended. Nigel spoke at a few places through the service marked in the same way as this paragraph is marked. The texts below were written up from notes and should be read in conjunction with the words of the service.

* also known as the Mass, Eucharist and Lord's Supper, depending on churchmanship.

Introductory remarks

Welcome to this service and a special welcome and thanks to Fr Andrew Day, who is presiding for us while I interject explanations. Thank you also to Ewan and the choir for singing Schubert's Mass in G major for us. Ewan will explain that Schubert omitted some of the Latin words of the Mass and that there are several explanations for why he did this. The omitted parts are in square brackets in the service text. The singing of the Mass has given me an opportunity to explain something of the meaning of this service.

In antiquity this service was scandalous, Christian cannibalism. Now that Christianity has been so widespread for so long, we have just become used to the idea. Nevertheless, there is something almost grotesque in eating a person's body, even if only symbolically. Yet, symbolically, such an eating from primitive times is an attempt to incorporate aspects of the dead one into the lives of the living. Amongst the many meanings of the Communion remains the idea that Christ comes to dwell within us through the eating of bread and the drinking of wine and that we shall come to leave carrying Christ with us into the world.

The New Testament points to the first Christians, probably from the start, celebrating the Lord's Supper or the Breaking of the Bread. This was in continuity with Jesus's Last Supper with his disciples.

The first Christians were Jews, of course. And the form of their worship arose from their pre-Christian practices. Two in particular: regular synagogue worship that focussed on the reading of the Law and the Prophets and the singing of Psalms; and the family celebration of the Passover meal, marking the escape from slavery in Egypt, which was also the occasion of the Last Supper. These two strands are represented by the two parts of the service: the Liturgy of the Word and the Liturgy of the Sacrament. These came to be supplemented by a brief dismissal and a more elaborate initial gathering section.

Another useful distinction is between the fixed parts of the service used every time, termed the Ordinary, and the parts that vary with the theme of a service, termed the Proper. For most choral Masses it is just the

Ordinary that is sung by the choir, as in Schubert's Mass. The Proper today is that for Trinity Sunday. Fortunately for our focus on the Eucharist, the Thursday after Trinity Sunday is Corpus Christi, the celebration of thanksgiving for the institution of the sacrament.

So, what is a sacrament? Famously, the Book of Common Prayer calls it an outward and visible sign of an inward and spiritual grace. It is not a mere prayer in hope from us humans to God, but something that has been ordained by God to have real and actual effects in our lives – though, as with any act of God, these effects can be frustrated by our human obduracy. This is a Church of England service, which has the advantage that the Church of England, as both Catholic and Reformed, has an order of service that points in both the directions of the Reformation and so is a helpful educational vehicle.

The service begins with the Gathering, starting with a simple greeting from the priest who is presiding over the service. The greeting acknowledges that we are in the presence of God, and this immediately reminds us of our sinfulness before the Holy. Thus we confess our sins, seek God's forgiveness, including in the words of the Kyrie (It is handy to note that many parts of the service have Latin or Greek names, usually the first word(s) of that section), and we are reassured of absolution. We respond with an ancient Trinitarian hymn of praise, the Gloria in Excelsis. The Collect is an overarching prayer over both Word and Sacrament. It is the first Proper in the service and today it is the Collect for Trinity Sunday.

In place of a sermon

This would normally be the place of the sermon or homily, the exposition and application of the readings for the day. The last reading is always from a gospel, for which people stand out of respect. There may be one or two readings from the New and Old Testaments and a Psalm. Today we have Matthew's account of the Last Supper.

The reading from Exodus is just one of many 'types' of the Eucharist from the Old Testament. (Of course, from a Jewish point of view the Hebrew Bible is their Scripture and there is nothing 'old' about it. The Christian approach is to see much continuity between God's dispensation or covenant – 'testament' – with the Jews between before Jesus's birth and after.) A Christian reading sees many prefigurings of Jesus in the Old Testament, including multiple ones of the Eucharist:

- This reading's account of the feeding of the Israelites with manna in the wilderness so Jesus gives the bread of life, his own body
- The Passover where the blood of the lambs on the doors saves the Israelites so the blood of Jesus saves those marked 'with the blood of the Lamb'
- The blood of the Covenant is sprinkled by Moses over the Israelites so the blood of Jesus seals the second covenant between God and people
- The sacrificial system, especially sacrifices for sin and the Day of Atonement ritual of the goats so Jesus's death echoes the former sacrifices
- The likening by the prophets of the Word of the Lord to bread so Jesus, incarnating in himself the Word of God, feeds his people on his words
- The prophetic anticipation of the Messianic banquet, a fulfilment so Jesus's meal is the proleptic sharing in the final feast

In response to the Word, we respond with commitment by saying together the Nicene creed.

Overview of the Sacrament	

As the service moves into the Liturgy of the Sacrament there is a renewal of greeting in the sharing of the Peace. This is a relic from the times when only the baptised were allowed to attend the sacramental part of the liturgy while the catechumens, who were being prepared for baptism, and general enquirers had to leave at this point. Once they were on their own, the baptised shared the deeper greeting of the Shalom, the divine promise of peace.

This is also a chance for people to recall Jesus's words that one should be reconciled with one's neighbours before bringing offerings to the altar. While moving about sharing the Peace, I have often gone up to people to apologise for less serious wrongs.

At the Offertory we, the people, bring to God the bread and the wine for consecration. That they will become to us the body and blood of Christ is, of course, solely the work of God through the Holy Spirit. And the offering of this sacrifice, technically the 'oblation', to the Father is the work of the Son. Thus, it is all very Trinitarian. And yet, it is fitting that us creatures bring the creatures of bread and wine, the joint achievement of nature and human effort, for this consecration (as reflected in the prayer over the gifts).

What now follows is set out in the order of Jesus at the Last Supper. Bread is taken, it and the wine are blessed, the bread is broken, and then both are given. The Narrative will rehears these movements and they are replayed by the priest who takes up the bread, gives thanks over it, breaks it into pieces, and then shares it.

Explanation of the Eucharistic Prayer

We now come to the first of the two most sacred moments, the consecration of the elements so that they become for us the very body and blood of Christ – the second is when we receive, eat and drink, and so partake in the body and blood of Christ.

The Eucharistic Prayer has several traditional and essential elements. These are indicated in the service text below.

- Sursum corda: this introductory dialogue enjoins both priest and people to be united in the prayer that follows, even if most of it is said just by the priest on behalf of all.
- The Preface: which is a rehearsal of all the wonderful deeds of God in thankfulness and praise. If the day is a festival, this will include relevant words, i.e. a Proper Preface. So today there is a focus on the glory of the eternal fellowship of love of the three Persons of the Holy Trinity.
- The Sanctus: which is based on the words that Isaiah heard in his vision, words that all the host of heaven were singing, all the angels and archangels and the saints before us. It is a reminder that in the service we are taking part in the eternal worship of God, privileged to stand at its fringe. This is usually followed by the Benedictus, "Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord." This is a reference not just to Jesus's entrance with palms to Jerusalem, and a reference to the entry of the Ark into the Temple, but specifically to the imminent arrival of Christ in the Sacrament.
- The Oblation: the presentation of the sacrifice of Christ to the Father. This happened once in history, but is eternally presented outwith time in heaven. Our experience of its eternal dimension is brought out in the anamnesis that follows.
- The Anamnesis: this is a Greek word often translated as 'memorial' or 'remembrance' in English. This, however, gives the wrong impression that it is a purely mental recollection. Theologically it is a making-real in our present of the historical and eternal act. This is similar to the way Jews 'remember' the Passover; they are, as it were, caught up in the great action of the escape from Egypt. And the act we are caught up in is not merely the death of Christ, but also his incarnation, his resurrection and his return at the consummation of all things (this is picked up in the later Acclamation).

- The Epiclesis: the prayer that the Holy Spirit will transform the bread and wine into the real presence of Christ in his body and blood. Tragically, disagreements about the exact nature of this transformation reared their ugly head at the Reformation and these persist between denominations to this day, though in an abated form.
- The Narrative of the Institution. This is a compilation of the words from both the gospels and Paul. It includes the words 'This is my body' and 'This is my blood' which many take as the moments when Christ, speaking through the priest, enacts that transformation as he did in that upper room two thousand years ago.
- The Acclamation: the affirmation of the whole people of God of what has happened and will happen.
- The Petition for the Church. This is the prayer that all the blessings flowing from the reconciling death of Christ should flow on in the life of the Church and her members, both those departed, especially the great saints of the church, and to those traditionally termed the 'Church Militant', those still struggling with the challenges of life here on earth. Anciently, tied to a sacrifice was the petition of the offerer that had prompted them to make it. In the early church, in advance of a Mass, the faithful would write the names of people in need and of those who had died on a folded board, a diptych. Something much like this is still included in the Catholic Church, but in the CofE the petitions are generally kept more general.
- The Doxology: a great paeon of praise to all three Persons of the Holy Trinity. It uses the old form that our prayers are made 'through' Christ, 'in' the Holy Spirit, 'to' the Father.
- Lastly, but not least, is the great Amen to the work of God 'so be it'. This is from all present, affirming that this great and holy prayer is the will of us all.

Appropriately, almost as the only prayer that could follow such an exalted prayer as has just been made, is the prayer our Lord taught us. Three of its petitions are particularly apt. There is the prayer of forgiveness, so that we might receive the Sacrament in a state of grace. The prayer for daily bread is for more than bodily nourishment; it is for the bread of life in the Body of Christ. And the summation of all prayer, that the Kingdom of God and his Christ might come in all its final completeness.

Concluding remarks

We have now had the Fraction, the breaking of the bread, the body given for many. The Agnus Dei was the song that covered this action, though now it tends to be used to cover part of the time it takes for people to receive Communion.

Those who wished have received Communion. The Church of England, rather typically, straddles both Catholic and Protestant positions. The words of administration in the Book of Common Prayer both identify the bread and wine as the Body and Blood of our Lord, and speak of receiving the Body and Blood in our hearts by faith. Of course, both are true.

There is a choice of prayers for after Communion. Today we have the Prayer Book thanksgiving for all the benefits of Communion, which it itemises. There are so many themes throughout the service:

- The assurance of God's favour and goodness towards us
- That we are part of the mystical body of Christ, members might be better translated in modern English as organs, e.g. guts, legs and eyes
- The sacrifice of Christ
- The mutual indwelling of Christ in the believer and the believer in him
- The symbol of food to sustain life
- The joy of a common party

- The pledge of the Messianic banquet to come
- Christ in us, the hope of the glory to come

And the prayer rehearses our commitments that sharing in the Sacrament entails:

- That we are to walk in the path of goodness, following the call and direction of God
- And after the pattern of Christ one feature, of which I think more could be made in the post-Communion prayers, is of picking up our cross to follow him. Specific Eucharistic links to this include Jesus's challenge to James and John as to whether they can drink the cup he drinks; while Luke has Jesus say at the Last Supper, "You are those who have endured with me in my trials... that you may eat and drink at my table in my kingdom."

Now that the bread and wine have been fully consumed, the risen Christ remains present in us as we leave the church for the world. We move from the liminal time of worship and return to normal life, but do so in a refreshed way, strengthened by the living Christ within. Just as the bread and wine were Christ for us, so we are now to be Christ for our neighbours and for the world. Blessed, "in the name of Christ" we go.

The Holy Communion

Schubert's Mass in G major in the context of the

Eucharistic Rite of Common Worship

15 June 2025

The Chapel at Churchill College, Cambridge

Introductory remarks

The Gathering

Hymn 95 Holy, holy, holy

The Greeting

The Lord be with you and also with you.

Prayers of Penitence

God the Father forgives us in Christ and heals us by the Holy Spirit. Let us therefore put away all anger and bitterness, all slander and malice, and confess our sins to God our redeemer.

Almighty God, our heavenly Father,

we have sinned against you and against our neighbour in thought and word and deed, through negligence, through weakness, through our own deliberate fault.

We are truly sorry and repent of all our sins.

For the sake of your Son Jesus Christ, who died for us, forgive us all that is past and grant that we may serve you in newness of life to the glory of your name.

Amen.

The Kyrie eleison

Lord, have mercy. Kyrie, eleison. Christ, have mercy. Christe, eleison. Lord, have mercy. Kyrie, eleison.

Absolution

Almighty God, who forgives all who truly repent, have mercy upon you, pardon and deliver you from all your sins, confirm and strengthen you in all goodness, and keep you in life eternal; through Jesus Christ our Lord.

Amen.

Gloria in Excelsis

Glory to God in the highest, and peace to his people on earth.

We praise you, we bless you, we adore you, we glorify you, we give you thanks for your great glory, Lord God, heavenly King,

O God almighty Father.

Lord Jesus Christ, only Son of the Father,
Lord God, Lamb of God,
you take away the sin of the world:
have mercy on us; receive our prayer.
[You are seated at the right hand of the
Father: receive our prayer.]
For you alone are the Holy One, you alone
are the Lord, you alone are the Most High,
Jesus Christ, with the Holy Spirit, in the
glory of God the Father.
Amen.

Glória in excélsis Deo et in terra pax homínibus bonæ voluntátis. Laudámus te, benedícimus te, adorámus te, glorificámus te, grátias ágimus tibi propter magnam glóriam tuam, Dómine Deus, Rex cæléstis, Deus Pater omnípotens.

Dómine Fili Unigénite, Iesu Christe,
Dómine Deus, Agnus Dei, Fílius Patris,
qui tollis peccáta mundi, miserére nobis;
qui tollis peccáta mundi, súscipe
deprecatiónem nostram.
[Qui sedes ad déxteram Patris, miserére nobis.]
Quóniam tu solus Sanctus, tu solus Dóminus,
tu solus Altíssimus, Iesu Christe, cum Sancto
Spíritu: in glória Dei Patris.
Amen.

The Collect

Almighty and everlasting God, you have given us your servants grace, by the confession of a true faith, to acknowledge the glory of the eternal Trinity and in the power of the divine majesty to worship the Unity: keep us steadfast in this faith, that we may evermore be defended from all adversities; through Jesus Christ your Son our Lord, who is alive and reigns with you, in the unity of the Holy Spirit, one God, now and for ever.

Amen.

The Liturgy of the Word

Readings

Exodus 16.9-15

At the end of each the reader may say For the word of the Lord.

Thanks be to God.

Gradual Psalm - 97 v1-6, 12 Ewan Campbell

Gospel Reading

Hear the Gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ according to *N*.

Glory to you, O Lord.

Matthew 26.17-19, 26-29

At the end

This is the Gospel of the Lord.

Praise to you, O Christ.

Sermon

The Creed

We believe in one God, the Father, the Almighty, maker of heaven and earth, of all that is seen and unseen. We believe in one Lord, Jesus Christ, the only Son of God, eternally begotten of the Father, God from God, Light from Light, true God from true God, begotten, not made, of one Being with the Father; through him all things were made. For us and for our salvation he came down from heaven, was incarnate from the Holy Spirit and the Virgin Mary and was made

For our sake he was crucified under Pontius Pilate; he suffered death and was buried. On the third day he rose again in accordance with the Scriptures; he ascended into heaven and is seated at the right hand of the Father.

man.

He will come again in glory to judge the living and the dead, and his kingdom will have no end. We believe in the Holy Spirit, the Lord, the giver of life, who proceeds from the Father and the Son, who with the Father and the Son is worshipped and glorified, who has spoken through the prophets.

[We believe in one holy catholic and apostolic Church.]

We acknowledge one baptism for the forgiveness of sins.

We look for the resurrection of the dead, and the life of the world to come.

Amen.

Prayers of Intercession

These responses may be used Lord, in your mercy hear our prayer.

Patrem omnipoténtem, factórem cæli et terræ, visibílium ómnium et invisibílium. Et in unum Dóminum lesum Christum, Fílium Dei Unigénitum, et ex Patre natum ante ómnia sæcula. Deum de Deo, lumen de lúmine, Deum verum de Deo vero, génitum, non factum, consubstantiálem Patri: per quem ómnia facta sunt.

Credo in unum Deum,

nostram salútem descéndit de cælis. Et incarnátus est de Spíritu Sancto ex María Vírgine, et homo factus est. Crucifíxus étiam pro nobis sub Póntio Piláto; passus et sepúltus est, et resurréxit

tértia die, secúndum Scriptúras, et

Qui propter nos hómines et propter

ascéndit in cælum, sedet ad déxteram Patris.

Et íterum ventúrus est cum glória, iudicáre vivos et mórtuos, cuius regni non erit finis. Et in Spíritum Sanctum, Dóminum et vivificántem: qui ex Patre Filió[que] procédit. Qui cum Patre et Fílio simul adorátur et conglorificátur: qui locútus est per prophétas.

[Et unam, sanctam, cathólicam et apostólicam Ecclésiam.]
Confíteor unum baptísma in remissiónem peccatórum.

Et exspécto resurrectiónem mortuórum, et vitam ventúri sæculi.
Amen.

And at the end
Merciful Father,
accept these prayers
for the sake of your Son,
our Saviour Jesus Christ.
Amen.

Overview of the Sacrament

The Liturgy of the Sacrament

The Peace

Peace to you from God our heavenly Father.

Peace from his Son Jesus Christ who is our peace.

Peace from the Holy Spirit, the life-giver.

The peace of the triune God be always with you.

The peace of the Lord be always with you and also with you.

Let us offer one another a sign of peace. *All may exchange a sign of peace.*

Preparation of the Table

Offertory

The gifts of the people may be presented.

256 Let all mortal flesh vv1-2

The president takes the bread and wine.

Blessed are you, Lord God of all creation:

through your goodness we have this bread to set before you, which earth has given and human hands have made.

It will become for us the bread of life.

Blessed be God for ever.

Blessed are you, Lord God of all creation: through your goodness we have this wine to set before you, fruit of the vine and work of human hands. It will become for us the cup of salvation.

Blessed be God for ever.

Explanation of the Eucharistic Prayer

The Eucharistic Prayer

Sursum corda

The Lord be with you
and also with you.
Lift up your hearts.
We lift them to the Lord.
Let us give thanks to the Lord our God.
It is right to give thanks and praise.

Preface

It is indeed right, it is our duty and our joy, at all times and in all places to give you thanks and praise, holy Father, heavenly King, almighty and eternal God, through Jesus Christ our Lord. And now we give you thanks because you have revealed the glory of your eternal fellowship of love with your Son and with the Holy Spirit, three persons equal in majesty, undivided in splendour, yet one God, ever to be worshipped and adored. Therefore with angels and archangels, and with all the company of heaven, we proclaim your great and glorious name, for ever praising you and saying:

Sanctus

Sanctus

Holy, holy, holy Lord,
God of power and might,
heaven and earth are full of your
glory.
Hosanna in the highest.
Blessed is he who comes in the
name of the Lord. Hosanna in the
highest
[Blessed is he who comes in the
name of the Lord
Hosanna in the highest]

Sanctus, Sanctus, Sanctus Dóminus Deus Sábaoth. Pleni sunt cæli et terra glória tua. Hosánna in excélsis. Benedíctus qui venit in nómine Dómini. Hosánna in excélsis.

Oblation and anamnesis

All glory be to you, our heavenly Father, who, in your tender mercy, gave your only Son our Saviour Jesus Christ to suffer death upon the cross for our redemption; who made there by his one oblation of himself once offered a full, perfect and sufficient sacrifice, oblation and satisfaction for the sins of the whole world; he instituted, and in his holy gospel commanded us to continue,

a perpetual memory of his precious death until he comes again.

Epiclesis

Hear us, merciful Father, we humbly pray, and grant that, by the power of your Holy Spirit, we receiving these gifts of your creation, this bread and this wine, according to your Son our Saviour Jesus Christ's holy institution, in remembrance of his death and passion, may be partakers of his most blessed body and blood;

The Institution Narration

who, in the same night that he was betrayed, took bread and gave you thanks; he broke it and gave it to his disciples, saying: Take, eat; this is my body which is given for you; do this in remembrance of me.

In the same way, after supper he took the cup and gave you thanks; he gave it to them, saying:
Drink this, all of you; this is my blood of the new covenant, which is shed for you and for many for the forgiveness of sins. Do this, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of me.

Acclamation

Great is the mystery of faith:

Christ has died:

Christ is risen:

Christ will come again.

Therefore, Lord and heavenly Father, in remembrance of the precious death and passion, the mighty resurrection and glorious ascension of your dear Son Jesus Christ, we offer you through him this our sacrifice of praise and thanksgiving.

Petition for the Church

Grant that by his merits and death, and through faith in his blood, we and all your Church may receive forgiveness of our sins and all other benefits of his passion.

Although we are unworthy, through our manifold sins, to offer you any sacrifice, yet we pray that you will accept this the duty and service that we owe.

Do not weigh our merits, but pardon our offences, and fill us all who share in this holy communion with your grace and heavenly blessing;

Doxology

through Jesus Christ our Lord,

by whom, and with whom, and in whom, in the unity of the Holy Spirit, all honour and glory be yours, almighty Father, for ever and ever.

Amen.

The Lord's Prayer

Let us pray with confidence as our Saviour has taught us
Our Father, who art in heaven,
hallowed be thy name;
thy kingdom come;
thy will be done;
on earth as it is in heaven.
Give us this day our daily bread.
And forgive us our trespasses,
as we forgive those who trespass against us.
And lead us not into temptation;
but deliver us from evil.
For thine is the kingdom,
the power and the glory,
for ever and ever.
Amen.

Breaking of the Bread

The president breaks the consecrated bread.

Every time we eat this bread and drink this cup, we proclaim the Lord's death until he comes.

The Agnus Dei

Lamb of God, you take away the sin of the world, have mercy on us.
Lamb of God, you take away the sin of the world, have mercy on us.
Lamb of God, you take away the sin of the world, grant us peace.

Agnus Dei, qui tollis peccáta mundi: miserére nobis.
Agnus Dei, qui tollis peccáta mundi: miserére nobis.
Agnus Dei, qui tollis peccáta mundi: dona nobis pacem.

Giving of Communion

The president says this invitation to communion

Draw near with faith.
Receive the body of our Lord Jesus Christ which he gave for you, and his blood which he shed for you.
Eat and drink in remembrance that he died for you, and feed on him in your hearts by faith with thanksgiving.

We do not presume

to come to this your table, merciful Lord, trusting in our own righteousness, but in your manifold and great mercies.

We are not worthy so much as to gather up the crumbs under your table. But you are the same Lord whose nature is always to have mercy.

Grant us therefore, gracious Lord, so to eat the flesh of your dear Son Jesus Christ and to drink his blood, that our sinful bodies may be made clean by his body and our souls washed through his most precious blood, and that we may evermore dwell in him, and he in us. Amen.

The president and people receive communion.

Authorized words of distribution are used and the communicant replies **Amen.**

Concluding remarks

Prayer after Communion

The Post Communion Prayers are said.

Almighty and ever-living God,

we thank you that you graciously feed us,

who have duly received these holy mysteries,

with the spiritual food of the body and blood of our Saviour Jesus Christ.

By this you assure us of your favour and goodness towards us:

we are incorporated into the mystical body of your Son,

the blessed company of all faithful people;

we are heirs, through hope, of your everlasting kingdom,

by the merits of Christ's precious death and passion.

Assist us with your grace, heavenly Father,

that we may continue in that holy fellowship,

and walk in goodness the way you have prepared for us;

through Jesus Christ our Lord, to whom, with you and the Holy Spirit,

be all honour and glory, now and for ever. Amen.

We thank you, Lord,

that you have fed us in this sacrament,

united us with Christ,

and given us a foretaste of the heavenly banquet

prepared for all peoples.

Amen.

The Dismissal

Lord, enthroned in heavenly splendour (t: St Helen); omit vv 3-4

Blessing

God the Holy Trinity make you strong in faith and love,

defend you on every side, and guide you in truth and peace;

and the blessing of God almighty,

the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit,

be among you and remain with you always.

Amen.

Dismissal

A minister says

Go in peace to love and serve the Lord.

In the name of Christ. Amen.

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