

# Through the Eucharist

with Canon Perran Gay

10am Sung Eucharists on 7th,  
14th and 21st June 2015

The  
Gathering

The  
Liturgy of the  
Sacrament  
and the  
Dismissal

The  
Liturgy of  
The Word





## Introduction

Sometimes it is a good thing to think for a moment about what we are doing and why. That is certainly true for our personal lives, but it is also true for the things we do in Church. Week by week we celebrate the amazing service called the Eucharist without really thinking about what we are doing. Why do we do what we do each Sunday morning? How have Christians understood it in the past, and how should we understand it today? How are we to make links between this central act of Christian worship and the way in which we live our lives for the rest of the week?

Nine years ago I offered a series of three sermons called 'Through the Eucharist – a liturgical and devotional journey.'

Several people were foolish enough to suggest that these should be repeated before I left, and so I undertook that journey again at the Sung Eucharists on June 7th, 14th and 21st 2015, when in place of a conventional sermon I spoke about each section of the service one by one:

- the Gathering (Part One given on June 7th)
- the Liturgy of the Word (Part two given on June 14th)
- the Liturgy of the Sacrament and the Dismissal (Part Three) given on June 21st)

These sermons are brought together in this booklet and I hope that they will provide you with some food for thought.

Canon Perran Gay  
*Canon Precentor*

# Through the Eucharist – Part One

7th June 2015

In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Well, we've reached the place in the service where you would normally expect to hear a sermon, and instead of a sermon I offer by way of a parting gift the first of a series of three talks first given nine years ago called: 'Through the Eucharist – a liturgical and devotional journey.' Week by week we come to church and experience this service called the Eucharist, and it does us no harm from time to time to examine what we are doing when we worship God in this way. And by calling it a journey, I hope that I am signalling to you that as we engage with God in this service we are spiritually on the move, that we are not the same people at the end of the service as we were at the beginning, but we are transformed by this wonderful act of worship with all its richness and all its power.

The Eucharist of course is the most common form of Christian worship the world over, and it has many names – Eucharist, which is the name that most liturgists prefer, really means Thanksgiving, taking its lead from the great prayer of Thanksgiving at its midst, which we often call the Eucharistic Prayer. It also reminds us that we are a people who should be in the business of giving thanks – at all times and in all places, whatever joys or sorrows that surround us, whatever our fears and our hopes, the characteristic mode of Christian praying is Eucharistic, we should be distinguished by our capacity to give thanks.

Sometimes this service is known as Holy Communion, a name that emphasises the sharing of the consecrated bread and wine, and reminds us that in this sacrament we enter a deeper relationship with Christ our risen Lord. Other Christians call it the Lord's Supper, which calls our attention to Jesus' original sharing of bread and wine with his friends. Yet others call it the Mass, from the Latin word *Missa* which comes at the very end of the service, 'Ite, missa est', which literally means 'Go, you are sent', but which is usually translated, 'Go, the Mass is ended'. And then there are yet other names: The Breaking of Bread, The Liturgy, each of which describes a particular aspect of this wonderful service that is so rich in meaning.

Let's start to explore some of those meanings right now as we begin our journey through the service. If you glance at our green service order, almost immediately you'll come across the word 'President' for the person who leads the service. Not everyone is keen on this word with its shades of President Obama (or even perhaps today President Bush), but it's probably the best word to describe what the Dean's job is here this morning, as he sits in the presidential chair, and presides over the gathered assembly. It isn't that he has to do everything, for lots of things are done by other people, a preacher, a dea-

con, readers, servers, musicians, communion assistants, lay assistants, vergers; not forgetting those who rang the bells and arranged the flowers in preparation for this act of worship, or who will serve the refreshments at its end. But Roger holds it all together. He begins and ends the service; he says certain important prayers, including the Eucharistic Prayer itself; and the rest of the time he sits or stands there, overseeing the whole act of worship and holding it together. He's the president, not the celebrant, which was the old name for this job, because we are all the celebrant, we are all celebrating the Eucharist together, while Roger is presiding over that celebration. And he's even put on his best green party costume for the occasion.

Meanwhile, the Canon Pastor, underneath her outer vestment, is wearing her coloured sash diagonally, a little in the manner of Miss World. This diagonal stole, sometimes with the square garment called a dalmatic on top, is a sign that today Canon Lynda is the deacon of the Eucharist. You may remember that the first deacons were commissioned by the apostles to wait at table so that the apostles could devote themselves to teaching and prayer. So deacons are the kind of servant figures of the Eucharistic assembly. Bishops and priests are all ordained deacon first, and they don't stop being deacons when they take on these other responsibilities. Deacons also remind us that we're all called to be servants, and we belong to a servant Church that worships Christ, the servant-Lord, who waited at tables and washed his disciples' feet. So the clergy take it in turns to be the deacon of the eucharist, and Lynda waits at table today, helping to prepare the altar while the president prepares spiritually for the great Eucharistic prayer. She introduces things like the confession and the peace, and she keeps an eye on all the arrangements so that the president is set free to preside and to pray.

So to the service itself, and you will see that the first main part is called 'The Gathering'. It's a new word that has come into our service orders with the advent of Common Worship. And what it's trying to express is that the first part of the service is taking each of us individual worshippers and gathering us into a community ready to encounter God. I know that some people take preparation for worship very seriously. They spend the night before having a look at the readings; they arrive in good time to be quiet or a moment and say their prayers, or to find out how others in the community are so as to be able better to pray for them. But a lot of us, and that can go for busy priests sometimes as well as everyone else, do sometimes arrive at the Eucharist without really sorting ourselves out. Perhaps we've got out of the wrong side of the bed, or fallen out with our nearest and dearest over breakfast; perhaps we didn't quite leave enough time for the journey here; perhaps we've suddenly realised that we've forgotten the shopping list for our slightly guilty post-service Sunday shopping trip to Marks and Spencer, Sainsbury or Tesco. Or perhaps there are really serious things on our mind, worries about exams,

relationship problems, or the onset of a troubling illness. Even if all is well with us, we still come into church as a group of individuals each with our own particular agenda. And through the first part of the service, God takes us, and gathers us into a congregation, who together will sit and listen to his word, be transformed through sharing in his sacrament, and be sent out together to serve him in his world. More of that next week and the week after next. But for now a quick journey through the gathering.

The choir sets the scene with some music from offstage, and then the opening hymn is sung – usually a great hymn of adoration, during which the procession enters the Cathedral and the choir and ministers go to their places in the Quire and on the Podium. If it is a very special day, the altar, the symbol of the crucified and risen Christ in our midst, is honoured with incense that stands for the prayers of the saints. And then the spoken liturgy begins.

‘In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit’ says the president, reminding us that all we do we do in the name of God, and many of us make the sign of the cross as we recall our baptism in the name of the Holy Trinity. It’s a lovely gesture to make, as we trace the shape of the cross by touching our fingers to forehead, to waist, and then to left and right breast, as a sign of God’s care touching us and holding us. Like all ritual gestures it is sometimes almost an automatic reflex, at other times a deep unspoken prayer, and like all ritual gestures it grows in meaning as we use it through the years. It’s also a sign that we giving ourselves to God, body as well as mind and spirit, that all our being is involved in his worship.

And then the president greets us with the greeting of God, and we respond with our greeting in return. As we do so, we begin our relationship with the president who will be our guide and our leader through the service to come. Then to these ritual words of greeting, the president may well add an informal greeting of welcome, especially to those new to our assembly, and tell us that the eucharistic welcome is continued after the service with coffee in the North Transept, or perhaps something a little stronger on a special day of thanksgiving such as today.

Adoration of God, acknowledging his wonder and his love leads naturally to prayers of penitence as we realise how far we have fallen short of that love. We get the prayers of penitence over with right at the start of the service, so that we can experience God through word and sacrament as those who have had their sins forgiven. And usually we kneel to say sorry, and have a chance to do so privately while the choir sings the words of the ancient plea to God. ‘Kyrie Eleison’, ‘Christe Eleison’, ‘Lord, have mercy’, ‘Christ, have mercy’. Then we bring our individual confessions into a corporate prayer of penitence, which is answered by the president declaring God’s words of for-

giveness. As forgiven sinners, we stand while the choir sings the song of the angels ‘Glory be to God on high’ which reminds us that Christ is the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world.

That’s what has happened today, but those of you who are regulars may have noticed that sometimes things are a little different. In the great festival periods of Christmas and Epiphany and of Easter, we really don’t want to focus on our sins too much, but concentrate on the joy of what Christ has done for us. So we remain standing for the briefest of confessions and are into the Gloria almost without a pause. While during those periods of Advent and Lent when we are preparing ourselves for the feast to come, and especially during Lent when we focus much more upon our sins, we spend much longer on our knees, and leave out the Gloria altogether.

We are almost God’s gathered people. Before we move on, there’s one more special moment of prayer called the Collect. This is not principally some kind of theme prayer, although it does often relate to the season we are in, but it is what it says it is, a time to collect up our individual prayers and offer them to God. You will see that the Collect has three parts. First the president says or sings; ‘Let us pray’. That isn’t an invitation to drop to our knees again – some Anglican congregations would drop to their knees in a wet field if you said ‘Let us pray’ – It’s nothing to do with posture but just what it says it is - an invitation to stand where we are in silence and to pray. Of course our prayer is going on through the whole Eucharist, but here’s a chance for it to come to the surface for a few moments as we remember that we stand in God’s presence. So the second part is the silence while we do that. And finally the president sings the prayer to collect all our thoughts and prayers together, and bring the Gathering to a close. Now we are ready to meet God in his word, declare our faith, and offer our prayers. And next Sunday we’ll look more closely at how we go about doing all of that.

In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit...Amen.

# Through the Eucharist – Part Two

14th June 2015

In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

This is part two of a three part journey through the Eucharist, and for those of you who missed last week's episode of our liturgical soap opera, here is the story so far. We have briefly explored the many names given to the Eucharist, each with its particular emphasis; we have been introduced to two of the principal characters in the drama – the President and the Deacon; and we have begun our journey through the service by looking at that part called the Gathering, which starts with our arrival at Church in various stages of readiness, and ends up with us as a gathered community with our sins forgiven, and with a sense of God's presence within us and among us.

At the heart of the service are two main sections: the Liturgy of the Word about which we are speaking today, and the Liturgy of the Eucharist which will be our principal theme next Sunday. And these two sections are of equal importance. First, as God's gathered people we sit around the table of the Word; and then we come to stand around the altar, the table of the Sacrament. I want to drive home that point about the equal importance of Word and Sacrament, because Christians for whom Eucharistic worship is central to their life – and by that I mean Eastern Orthodox Christians, Roman Catholics, many Anglicans, and quite a lot of Reformed Christians too – those of us who belong to that kind of tradition are sometimes accused by so-called Bible-believing Christians of not taking Scripture seriously. Now we may not take everything in the Bible literally, or share the views of these other Christians about certain issues in Biblical interpretation, but I hope that there is no doubt in your minds about how seriously we take the Bible here, and how central it is to our life. And we try to reflect that by providing the largest amount of Scripture permitted within Common Worship – three readings and a Psalm on every Sunday and Principal Feast.

Usually the first of these readings comes from the Old Testament, those ancient traditions that we share with our Jewish brothers and sisters, and which tell of God's dealings with his people of old. In the season of Easter this is replaced by a reading from the Acts of the Apostles, as we hear of the life of the first Christians in the light of the resurrection. Then we reflect on the theme of our first reading as we sing a Psalm, usually by listening to a Cantor from the choir sing the text while we sing a refrain line after every few verses. This is one of the ways in which the psalms were designed to be used, when they formed the hymn book of the Jerusalem temple three thousand years ago, and I hope that you have come to find this particular way of using the psalms a helpful aid to your meditation on their beautiful words. A second reading follows, from the letters of the first Christians, or from that book of images called the Revelation to St. John

written to encourage Christians undergoing persecution.

At the end of this, as at the end of the first reading, we are encouraged to understand what we have heard as the Word of the Lord. That may sometimes be a hard thing to do, if the passage has been difficult to understand, or if it contains material that seems not to fit in with our image of God. Yet we do believe that the Bible taken as a whole is God's principal revelation to us of his nature and his purpose, and that we are called to find in each passage something of that nature and that purpose. A course of daily guided Bible reading may well help us to do this, as may surrounding our private Scripture reading with prayer. And at the Eucharist, help may yet be provided in the sermon which is to follow a little later in the liturgy.

But first the Liturgy of the Word is going to reach its climax in the proclamation of the Gospel, that part of the Bible that contains the story of the life and teachings, the sufferings, death and resurrection of Jesus. We prepare for it as we sing the Acclamation 'Alleluia – Praise the Lord', and watch as the drama unfolds, and a procession makes its way to the centre of the Nave. At its heart is the Gospel Book itself, escorted by candles, and sometimes honoured with incense. And there too is the Deacon who is sent out by the President, as we symbolise Christ the Servant being sent by God the Father from the glories of eternity to share our life and our death and bring us to be with God forever. In our midst, that same Christ speaks his word to us afresh, and his Gospel is born anew in our hearts as we are transformed by what we hear. So we stand in awe and reverence to listen; perhaps we sign ourselves three times with the cross, on forehead, lips and breast, as we ask God to bless our thinking, our speaking and our loving; and at the end the Deacon kisses the Book of the Gospels, as a token of our love for Christ whom the Gospel has revealed to us. It is one of the most significant moments in the entire service, and the climax of the Liturgy of the Word.

But that Liturgy isn't over yet, for next comes the sermon. While from time to time the preacher will want to develop a topical theme, or perhaps provide a series of teaching sermons like this one, the main purpose of the sermon, especially at the Eucharist, is to expound Scripture, and often the Gospel Reading. Each year we read through one of the first three Gospels (leaving most of St. John for Eastertide), so there are often developing themes which the preacher will want to pick up, and she or he will also want to set the readings into their proper context, so as to help us understand better what God might be saying to us through them, and make links between them and our own lives as Christian believers and as a Church.

When the sermon is over, we keep a time of silence for reflection, before we stand to make an Affirmation of Faith, usually through the words of the Nicene Creed, or the Nicene-Constantinopolitan Creed as it should more properly be called, but I'm rather pleased we've gone for the shorter name. Just as in Gospel and sermon we

looked at one part of the faith in detail, now we look at the whole picture in its broadest outline. People often have trouble with creeds in general and this one in particular. It sometimes seems as if we're being asked to believe a hundred impossible things before breakfast, but that may be because we're approaching the Creed as some kind of monolith, rather than as a series of individual building blocks for our faith. It may be helpful to remember that there are all kinds of different language being used in the Creed – some of it literal and historical: such as Christ suffering 'under Pontius Pilate'; some of it in the language of picture and metaphor where only picture and metaphor will do as in Christ's seat 'at the right hand of the Father'; and some of it in the language of theological speculation: such as Christ being 'eternally begotten of the Father' and the Spirit 'who proceeds from the Father and the Son'. So while some bits demand our simple assent to something as a fact of history, other parts call more for a sense of imagination or wonder.

Or perhaps some of it seems rather alien and peculiar to you. If you think that, you're in good company. Those who compiled the creed did so to answer the great questions of their day in the face of other thinkers whose theology was in danger of derailing the Church. If we wrote a creed today, we would probably be interested in rather different questions than whether the Spirit proceeded from the Father and the Son, or just from the Father. I can't say that I lose a lot of sleep over that one, but in its own day, it was enough to split the Church in half. Yet the Creeds are important, not because we want to say the same things today as our forebears in the fourth century, but because we want to say that we belong to the same Church as they did all those centuries ago, still holding to the same central articles of faith, still the same one holy catholic and apostolic church. And if you stumble over a particular phrase or doctrine, remember that this is the faith that the Church believes - that's why we've gone back to the original form of the Creed which is 'We believe', not 'I believe'. Even if some of us aren't quite sure about this and that, together 'we believe'.

The Liturgy of the Word ends with the Prayers of Intercession. While the theology of what we are doing when we ask God for things could take up an entire sermon series all by itself, the actual liturgical principles and practice are quite straightforward. The deacon offers prayers on our behalf, leaving space within them for us to make them our own, and usually praying for the church, the world, the local community, those in trouble and the departed, before the president gathers all our prayers together in a final collect.

And then we stand for the Peace. It technically belongs to next week's sermon, but as it serves as a kind of bridge between Word and Sacrament, we could equally well include it in today's talk. I want to deal with it now so that we leave time next week to look at the great Eucharistic Prayer together.

The Peace hasn't been the most universally popular part of the service. The instructions in Common Worship are

clear that while the Greeting of Peace is compulsory, the Exchange of the Peace is optional. And for many years in many places it was a real bone of contention. When it first appeared in the sixties, it was attacked by some as some new-fangled piece of liturgical theatre that was irreverent and distracting in the middle of a solemn service of worship. In some places peace free zones were established, although in the end peace kept breaking out all over the place. The religious cartoonists had a field day with it. My favourite picture is the well dressed elderly lady turning away from the longhaired youth proffering a tattooed hand with the immortal words: 'No thank you, we're 1662'. And yet I remember too the serious article in which one woman explained why the Peace was so important for her. It was the only time in the week, she said, when another human being touched her.

In one sense the Peace is all about the power of that symbolic action. Just talking about being at peace won't do, we have to show that peace through a ritual gesture. And it is a very ancient gesture, not something dreamt up by liturgical committees, but a rediscovery of the Bible's most common liturgical instructions – to greet one another with the Kiss of Peace, or if that's a bit too hot-blooded and Mediterranean for you, then at least a good old firm British handshake. And we do it at this point of the service in obedience to another Biblical command, this time from Jesus, that before we bring our gift to the altar we are to be reconciled to one another, a community that is at peace with itself and its God, a congregation not only gathered, but united around the one true Word of God, and moving together into the sacrament of unity. The Peace makes us realise that all this religion business isn't just something private and personal between us and God, although it is that as well. It's also about our relationships with one another and with the wider world that is the object of God's love and where he asks us to meet him. So just as a little later on we will stretch out our hands to receive the Body of Christ, as we exchange the Peace we also stretch out our hands to receive the Body of Christ, for we are that Body. And just as by faith we look beyond the outward appearance of a piece of unleavened bread and perceive our crucified and risen Lord, so we look at Janet, or David, or our nearest and dearest sitting beside us, or a complete stranger in the row behind, and see in them our living loving Jesus. In the Peace we encounter no one less than Christ himself, as we then go on to meet him in another way at his table in the Liturgy of the Eucharist. And that will be our theme next week.

In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

# Through the Eucharist – Part Three

21st June 2015

In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

This is part 3 of a trilogy of sermons charting our course liturgically and devotionally through the eucharist. For those who missed parts one and two, it will all soon be available on the Cathedral website. To summarise, we have seen how the service has helped us to gather together as the family of God, and how we have then sat around the table of God's Word, listening to that Word read in Scripture, expounded through the sermon, and celebrated in the Creed, before responding to that Word in prayer for the world, and in the greeting and exchange of Peace which acts as a kind of hinge between Word and Sacrament. Having been reconciled to one another, we are now ready to bring our gifts to the altar.

And that leads us to the main part of today's sermon, in which we look at the Liturgy of the Sacrament. As we celebrate that liturgy, we are always remembering the last meal of Jesus with his friends. I know that the Eucharist is about much more than that, but it certainly isn't about less than that. At that meal, Jesus took bread, said the blessing, broke it and gave it to his friends – four distinct and distinctive actions. And in case we think that that fourfold sequence is accidental, it occurs not only in the Gospel accounts of the Last Supper, and the parallel passage in Paul's Letter to the young Church in Corinth, but also in the oft told story of the loaves and the fishes, and Luke's masterly reflection on the Easter mystery in the story of the Emmaus Road. Each time we hear that same sequence – Jesus took, Jesus blessed or gave thanks, Jesus broke and Jesus gave. And those four actions are recalled in this service.

Jesus **took** bread. It would be sufficient for the president to pick up some bread and wine from the altar, or from the side table in the sanctuary, and indeed that's what happens in the quiet celebrations of the Eucharists that take place here every morning at 8.00 a.m. But at this service we make more of it than that. Members of the congregation volunteer to bring the elements of bread and wine forward through the congregation, to be received at the altar. Just as God has brought the good news of his love to us through Jesus, and we have shown that in the Gospel procession moving into the body of the Nave, so now this procession shows our response to God's love. As bread and wine are carried through the congregation, they become the gifts of the whole congregation, signs of our life, the bread of our daily toil, and the wine of our delight in God's world, gifts which came from God and which we offer back to him to be transformed, the wine mixed by the deacon with a little water to recall the

blood and water that flowed from Christ's wounded side. Those lovely prayers at the offering of the gifts express this whole dynamic memorably and succinctly.

'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.'

So too with the wine.

And this is also the obvious moment to have a collection of money taken and also brought to the altar, as a tangible expression of our love for God, and a sign of our response in body and spirit to what he has given us.

Sometimes we use incense again at this point of the service. The president censes the altar and the gifts which the deacon has prepared to honour God's presence within them, and then everyone in the church is censed, not just the president and the other priests, but all of us, because we too are the body of Christ, God's holy people, given in love by God to his world.

The president washes his or her hands, as a sign of the purity required of all Christians as they approach the Lord's Table, and then it's time for the great prayer that gives its name to the whole service – The Eucharistic Prayer, or Prayer of Thanksgiving. It isn't called the Prayer of Consecration, although we believe the elements are consecrated through its use, but the Prayer of Thanksgiving, recalling how Jesus gave thanks over the bread and the wine at the Passover meal.

The Prayers we use have a very similar shape and design, but today we're using Prayer B on page 15, so I'd like to speak briefly about that one. You will notice first of all that it is all one prayer from the top of page 15 to the bottom of page 17. There is no Amen after the Sanctus, nor after the Acclamation 'Christ is the bread of life', but only when the prayer is complete. There are said bits and sung bits, the singing being to emphasise some parts of the prayer, but it is only one prayer. And that's why the instructions in Common Worship are quite clear, that there should as far as possible be no changes of posture during the prayer. Being Anglicans of course, there is no compulsion to do anything, and we talk about guidelines rather than instructions. It is always acceptable to stand or to sit or to kneel (although probably not to stand on our heads) as the mood takes us. But it is greatly preferred that whatever we do, we should do it for the whole prayer. And we suggest that standing might well be the most appropriate of those postures, because while there are elements of petition and intercession within the prayer, the dominant mood is thanksgiving, as we, in the words of Prayer B, are 'counted worthy to stand in your presence and serve you'.



What I find fascinating about studying the Eucharistic Prayer is how that, apart from Cranmer's experiment with the Book of Common Prayer, the shape of the prayer has hardly changed through the whole of Christian history. When we pray this prayer, whether or not we use the exact language of our forebears, we are one with them in spirit in this most characteristic expressions of Christian praying. We start with a dialogue between the President and the congregation, re-establishing their relationship, and inviting them to give thanks during the prayer which follows. We are to lift up our hearts, as we take our earthly worship to the very gates of the courts of heaven where the angels sing around the throne of God.

Next the president praises God for his mighty acts. This part has sometimes been called the Preface, which is a bit of a misleading title for us as it suggests that the real business is still to happen and this is some kind of foreword. It's a translation of the Latin *Praefatio*, which means Proclamation, as we proclaim the mighty acts of God, either in general, or with a particular focus if it's Advent or Christmas or Easter or a Saints' Day. We thank God for what he is, and for what he has done for us, until our Thanksgiving spills over into Adoration, as we go through the heavenly gates and join the worship of the angels. This is obviously a moment where only music will do, and where we are particularly privileged to have a choir that can perform such diverse settings of these glorious words – Sanctus, Sanctus, Sanctus – Holy, holy, holy.

As we continue to praise God, we ask him to send his Holy Spirit upon us and upon the gifts of bread and wine that we have set before him, 'that they may be for us the body and blood of your dear Son'. You can see this calling upon the Spirit, the moment that the theologians call the *Epiclesis*, signified by the sweep of the President's hands as she or he says 'grant that by the power of your Holy Spirit'. What all that means exactly has kept those same theologians busy for two thousand years, and I won't even try to unravel it in a few short sentences this morning. I hope that it will suffice to say that when we receive the elements at the Eucharistic Prayer we are not dealing in every sense with bread and wine, but with the Body and Blood of Christ.

Having invoked the Spirit we then recall the meal of Jesus and his friends when he encouraged us to take bread and wine and identify them with his broken body and spilled out blood, in remembrance of him. And at this devotional heart of the prayer, the bread and the wine are lifted up for adoration, and the bell rings to tell the outside world that Christians are continuing to recall the death and resurrection of Christ in their midst. And the prayer goes on, 'And so, Father, calling to mind his death on the cross'

This is the moment that the scholars call the *Anamnesis* (and there are no tests at the end of this, by the way), the moment of recalling, remembering, calling to mind. The problem with all our language here is that it tends to suggest that the one we are remembering is absent, while in fact the opposite is true. We are not merely recalling something that is past, but, through God's Spirit, we are bringing those events into the present, so that Jesus is in our midst under the forms of bread and wine just as surely as he was with his friends in the first Upper Room. And we are also linked with the future as what we do here is a foretaste of the glories that one day will be revealed to us.

'O *sacrum convivium*' as the choir sometimes sing for an introit: 'O sacred banquet in which Christ is consumed, the memory of his passion is contemplated, the mind is filled with grace, and a pledge of future glory is given to us. Alleluia.' And in the hope of that future glory we acclaim the one who died, is risen and is to come, and offer our petitions of hope for the full coming of that kingdom, before the prayer ends in a grand doxology of praise to the Holy Trinity, and we sing the most important word uttered by the congregation, Amen – Let it be so, as we give our assent and are caught up into the Eucharistic action.

So the Lord's people, gathered on the Lord's Day around the Lord's table in the very presence of that Lord, offer the prayer that he taught his followers, a prayer that sums up so much of what the Eucharist is about, a desire that heaven may be realised on earth.

It's almost time to receive communion, but not before the third of those characteristic acts of Jesus, in which he breaks the bread that he has blessed. This is not just a practical necessity if we are to share in the meal, it's also a reminder that the body of Christ was a body broken for us on the cross, that only through his brokenness are we made whole. And it is that sacrificial Lamb of God who invites us to share in his supper – not our supper, certainly not the president's supper, but the supper of Jesus, the crucified and risen Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world and gives us God's peace. Of course we reply that we are not worthy: none of us is ever worthy to receive Christ – that's the whole point. But God accepts us just as we are, and as we eat the Body of Christ we more and more become the Body of Christ.

Now is the time for our final private preparations for communion, as we wait in our places, or in the line moving through the Nave and Quire, asking that we may recognise the Body and Blood of Christ. We say 'Amen' at that moment of recognition as Christ gives himself to us afresh, and then have another opportunity to reflect for a few moments on what that will mean for our lives in the

week that lies ahead.

For already our focus is shifting - from the gathered community encountering Christ in the Word and the Sacrament, to the demands of that same Christ to serve him and to discover him in the world. So our final prayers of thanksgiving we say standing, ready for action and service, and we ask God to send us out in the power of his Spirit. The Liturgy of the Sacrament is over and we have reached the Dismissal, the shortest section of the service but the point to which everything else has been leading. The president and the ministers move back to the Podium from where the service began. They too are on the way out from the Holy Place of encounter with God to the world that lies beyond the Cathedral doors. So the president declares God's blessing upon us, and the deacon challenges us to go out as transformed people, in the peace of Christ. We have shared that peace in action, we have known that peace in our hearts as the Lamb of God has given it to us, now we are to make peace in a troubled world. And next week and the week after that, we will gather again from that same world to seek God in the Scriptures and in the Breaking of the Bread, until the world of the Eucharist and the world of our daily lives form a perfect unity of praise.

In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.



