

## Worship 101: The Service of the Sacrament

We continue with our series on worship, this time looking at the service of Holy Communion or the Service of the Sacrament which begins with what is called the Preface. The preface is very old being used by Christians for almost 2,000 years. It is called the preface because this is what it does: It prepares our hearts for something very profound and important: the receiving of the very body and blood of Christ for the forgiveness of our sins.

The preface is made up of responsive readings between the pastor and the congregation. “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 Him thanks and praise.”

After this comes the proper preface that the pastor reads from the worship book on the altar. The proper preface starts out: “It is truly good, right and salutary...” What follows varies with the season of the year beginning with Advent.

The next part of the Service of the Sacrament is called the “Sanctus.” The word sanctus is from the Latin for holy and is how this short hymn begins: “Holy, Holy, Holy...” It is a combination of Isaiah 6:3 and Psalm 118:26. The Sanctus comes from the Jewish synagogue and was sung by Jesus. Also, on Palm Sunday the people of Jerusalem welcomed Jesus into Jerusalem with these words from Psalm 118. The congregation sings the sanctus as a way of welcoming Jesus who is about to “come” or “appear” in and with His body and blood in Holy Communion. It too helps us prepare to rightly receive the body and blood of our Lord.

This is followed by a Prayer of Thanksgiving. One of the things that the church has always done in connection with the Lord’s Supper is to give thanks for this gift. This is sometimes why Holy Communion is referred to as “the Eucharist.” The word eucharist come from the Greek language and means “to give thanks.” We see this in 1 Corinthians 10:16 where the apostle Paul says: “Is not the cup of thanksgiving for which we give thanks (eucharist) a communion in the blood of Christ?”

As part of our Sacrament of the Altar liturgy we pray the Lord’s Prayer. In this we continue the custom of the ancient church to pray this prayer in connection with the receiving of the Lord’s Supper.

After the Lord’s Prayer the pastor repeats Jesus’ words that instituted or began this ceremony. They start out: “Our Lord Jesus Christ, on the night when He was betrayed, took bread, and wine He had given thanks, He broke it and gave it to the disciples and said: “Take, eat; this is My body, which is given for you...” By saying these words the pastor is repeating the words of Jesus when He instituted this sacrament. Because they are the all-powerful words of God the Son, a miracle takes place in that the bread on the altar remains bread yet at the same time is the very body of Christ crucified for the sins of the world. The wine remains wine and yet it is also the very blood of Christ shed on Calvary’s cross for the forgiveness of the sins of the world. Therefore you eat the true body of Christ crucified for you; you drink the very blood of Christ poured out for you for the forgiveness of your sins.

Next time we’ll conclude our series on worship looking at the concluding parts of the communion liturgy and the Benediction.

In Christ,  
Pastor Bloom