

The Lutheran Liturgy -- Its Biblical Roots

An Outline of the Order of Holy Communion*

* the following presentation corresponds to the order of Divine Service II from the Hymnal *Lutheran Worship*, pp. 158ff.

The service of preparation

PARTS OF THE SERVICE

EXPLANATION

The Prelude



Music helps draw us into an attitude of prayer and praise.

The Ringing of the Bells

This is a call to God's people "to enter the lord's gates with thanksgiving and His courts with praise" (Psalm 100:4).

A Hymn of Invocation



We are a "singing church," so we follow the advice of the apostle Paul to teach and admonish "one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing with grace in your hearts to the lord" (Colossians 3:16). This hymn may be one of praise, prayer, or reflection on the season of the church year.

The Invocation

We call upon God to be present with us. We worship the triune God, remembering our Baptism in His name*. Amen means "So be it, it is true!"

* Matt. 28:19; Matt. 18:20; Eph. 2:18.

The Confession of Sins

We examine ourselves and publicly confess our sins. Such a confession at the beginning of the service provides a climate of acceptance. In spite of our sins, we are accepted by God, and in turn we can accept each other.

* I John 1:8-10 [Rom. 7:14-8:4].

The Absolution or Declaration of Grace

Christ said to his disciples, "If you forgive anyone his sins, they are forgiven"*. The pastor speaks for God and announces God's cleansing forgiveness to those who made confession.

* John 20:23.

The Service of the Word

From the time of the apostles down through today, an important part of the service has been the reading of the Scriptures, including the Old Testament Lesson, the Epistle Lesson from the New Testament, and the Gospel Lesson. The reason for including these readings is the scriptural principle that God's Word is the only rule and

guide for Christian faith and living. The Service of the Word concludes with the sermon (which is the preached word), the church's confession of faith in response to God's Word, and the prayers of God's people.

The Introit of the Day Introit is a Latin word meaning "he enters into." The Introit is a part of a psalm or a hymn that announces the theme of the day and begins the Service of the Word. Many years ago the faithful would meet outside and then proceed into the church. The pastor and the people would chant psalms as they entered the sanctuary. The Introit traditionally consists of an Antiphon, or refrain, a Psalm or a series of Psalm verses, the Gloria Patri*, and the Antiphon repeated.

* Rom. 16:27; Eph. 3:21; Phil. 4:20; Rev. 1:6, 8.

The Kyrie



Kyrie is a Greek word meaning "O Lord." It is a cry to the Lord for help and strength*. In ancient times, the crowds would shout "Lord, have mercy" as the King entered their town. The church has taken over his prayer to greet its King Jesus Christ in the church service. As the people so long ago expected help from their King, so we Christians expect help from our Savior.

* Matt. 9:27; Matt. 15:22; Matt. 20:30-31; Luke 17:13.

The Hymn of Praise

Two hymns of praise, "Glory to God in the highest" and "This is the feast of victory," give the congregation the opportunity to praise God and express joy because Jesus is our victorious Savior. During Advent and Lent, the hymn of praise is omitted.

* "Glory to God in the highest," Luke 2:14; "This is the feast of victory," Rev. 5:12f.

The Salutation

In the Salutation, the pastor and the congregation greet each other in the Lord's name.

* Ruth 2:4; Luke 1:28; II Thess. 3:16; II Tim. 4:22.

The Collect of the Day

The main thoughts of the day are collected, or summarized in this short prayer. The collects for the reason of the church year have come to us from the rich treasury of the church's heritage.

The First Lesson

The first reading is from the Old Testament, except during the Easter season when it is from the Book of Acts. This reading usually relates to the Gospel of the day.

* I Tim. 4:13.

The Gradual

Gradual, a Latin expression meaning "step," is a scripture passage for each season of the church year. It is a response to the First Lesson and a bridge to the Second Lesson. Sometimes a psalm is sung or spoken.

The Second Lesson

The second reading is from one of the epistles (letters) in the New Testament.

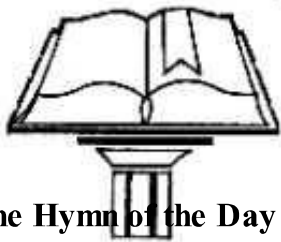
The Verse

A verse from the holy scriptures is usually sung in preparation for the reading of the Gospel. There are general verses* as well as specific verses for the seasons of the church year.

* John 6:68; Joel 2:13 (through lent).

The Holy Gospel

The Gospel Lesson is a selection from the accounts of the life of our Lord recorded by the four evangelists, St. Matthew, St. Mark, St. Luke, and St. John. Because Christ is with us in the Gospel reading, we stand to honor his presence.



The Hymn of the Day

We also sing versicles (short verses) before and after the reading of the Gospel. On certain festival days the minister may read the Gospel while standing among the people. He may be flanked by acolytes carrying candles who proclaim Jesus and his word as the "light of the world."

This hymn follows the theme of the readings and set the stage for the sermon. Suggested hymns of the day are listed on page 976-78 of Lutheran Worship.

The Sermon

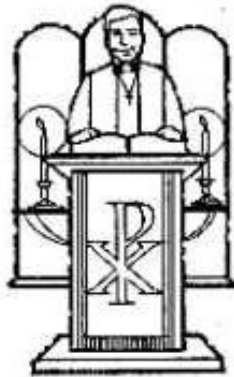
The Pastor proclaims God's Word and applies that word to modern life and problems. He stresses both what God demands of us (the Law) and what God does for us through Jesus Christ (the Gospel).

The Creed

After hearing the word of God read and proclaimed, the worshiper responds with his confession of faith in the words of the Nicene Creed. It is customary for the Nicene Creed to be spoken when Holy Communion is celebrated and on major festivals. The Apostles' Creed is used at other times.

* I Cor. 15:1ff; I Pet. 3:18ff; I Tim. 3:16.

The Prayers



This prayer in the service follows the directive of the Apostle Paul to young Timothy, a pastor: "I urge, then, first of all, that requests, prayers, intercession and thanksgiving be made for everyone - for Kings and all those in authority, that we may live in peaceful and quiet lives in all godliness and holiness"*. For this reason, the hymnal says "prayers are included for the whole church, the nations, those in need, the parish, and special concerns. The congregation may be invited to offer petitions and thanksgivings. The minister gives thanks for the faithful departed, especially for those who have died" (LW pages 168-69).

* I Tim. 2:1-2.

The Service of the Sacrament

The church has confessed its sins and been forgiven, and its faith has been nurtured through hearing the Word. The church now reaches a climax of the worship experience in the celebration of the sacrament of Holy Communion. The following parts of the liturgy help the worshipers partake of the holy meal thoughtfully, thankfully, and joyfully.

The Offering



The gifts of God's people are a response to God's blessings "as God has prospered them" (1 Corinthians 16:2). Our offerings are for the support of the church. They enable the church to provide the written and spoken word of God, Christian education, and pastoral care, food, clothing, shelter, and a helping hand to those in need.

The Offertory

As the offerings are brought to the Lord's table, the worshipers sing the offertory* to express gratitude for all God's blessings, dedicate themselves to God, and request His continued blessings.



* "What shall I render to the Lord," Ps. 116:12, 17, 13-14, 19; "Create in me a clean heart", Ps. 51:10-12.

The Preface

Preface means "introduction." The pastor and people get ready to celebrate the Holy Meal by greeting each other and with an exhortation as how to celebrate the meal.

* Cf. "Salutation"; Lam. 3:41; Ps. 86:4.

The appropriate (or Proper) Preface

These words state why we should give thanks using words and ideas appropriate for the season of the church year.

* Pss. 69:30; 95:2; 100:4; 107:22; 116:17; 147:7.

The Sanctus



Sanctus is a Latin word meaning "Holy." The Sanctus contains words from Isaiah's vision of God (Isaiah 6:3) and the crowd's response on Palm Sunday when Jesus entered the city of Jerusalem (Matthew 21:9). We join them in spirit by singing their words as we anticipate Christ's coming in the sacrament.

* Is. 6:3; Matt. 21:9 (Mk 11:9); Ps. 118:25-26.

The Lord's Prayer

We pray to God as our Father using the prayer of the family of God* because the Lord's Supper is our family meal.

* Matt. 6:9ff; Luke 11:2ff.

The Words of Institution

The pastor speaks the words which Jesus spoke when He instituted the Supper with His disciples in the Upper Room. With these words the bread and wine are consecrated, that is, set apart for God's use in the special meal.

* 1 Corinthians 11:23-26; Matthew 26:26-28; Mark 14:22-24; Luke 22:19-20.

The Peace

The greetings of peace which Jesus spoke on the first Easter is shared before we approach the altar to receive Him. *In the Lord's Supper, the body and blood of Christ are truly present in, with, and under the bread and wine.*

* John 14:27; John 20:19-21.

The Agnus Dei



Agnus Dei is a Latin phrase meaning "Lamb of God." John the Baptist spoke these words as he pointed to Jesus coming toward him (John 1:29). As Christ comes to us in the Holy Supper, we recognize him as the Lamb of God sacrificed for us to free us from the bondage of sin and death.

* John 1:29; Is. 53:7.

The Administration of the Supper



As we kneel at the Lord's Table, the pastor invites us, "Take, eat; this is the true body of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, given into death for your sins. Take, drink, this is the true blood of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, shed for the forgiveness of your sins." After we receive the Sacrament we hear the comforting words spoken by the pastor, "The body and blood of our Lord strengthen and preserve you in the true faith to life everlasting." We respond, "Amen," for this is our sincere desire. It is a good practice to offer a silent prayer of thanks when we return to our pews. While the meal is being distributed, the congregation and/or the choir sing one or more hymns.

The Post-Communion Canticle

"Thank the Lord," "Lord, now let Your servant go in peace," or an appropriate hymn is sung. The purpose is to offer our thanks and express our faith in what God has done for us and promised to do for us in the future.

* "Lord, now you let Your servant go in peace", Luke 2:29f.

The Prayer of Thanks

Once again we express our appreciation to our gracious God for giving us this Holy Meal through Jesus Christ, our Lord and Savior.

* Pss. 107:1; 118:1.

The Blessing



The blessing spoken by the pastor is the Aaronic benediction, the blessing God first gave to Aaron and the other priests to speak to the people of Israel. Jesus Christ, our High Priest, has come to us in a special way through this Holy Meal. The blessing is God's promise that Christ will go with us as we leave the church and return to the world to serve Him. We sing "Amen" to affirm the blessing; "So be it -- it is true!"

* Numbers 6:23-27.

*(Author unknown)
Revised slightly May 5, 2005.*