Written in an engaging style that is both conversational and informative, *Inwardly Digest* is a timely invitation to life in the Spirit sustained by the patterns and rhythms of the Prayer Book.

—Frank Griswold
25th Presiding Bishop of The Episcopal Church

With the spiritual foundation in *The Book of Common Prayer*, Derek Olsen shows how everyday Christians can grow closer to God through a "training regimen" that incorporates the spirituality of Anglican liturgy as a daily practice. In straightforward and accessible writing, Olsen provides a guide to Prayer Book spirituality for everyone.

—The Rev. Susan Brown Snook
Episcopal priest and editor of *Acts to Action: The New Testament's Guide to Evangelism and Mission*

INWARDLY DIGEST

THE PRAYER BOOK AS GUIDE TO A SPIRITUAL LIFE

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CHAPTER 9
THE SHAPE OF THE EUCHARIST

Despite the variety of options available, any prayer book Eucharist still has a fundamental shape and character that defines it. Every Eucharist has two complementary halves, each of which celebrates the mystery of the presence of Christ. First, there is a celebration of Christ as the living Word of God who has been breathed by the Father and communicated through the Spirit. Second, there is the celebration of Christ as Incarnate Savior who offers himself in love to the Father through the Spirit. The highlight of the first half is the manifestation of Christ in the proclamation of the Gospel. The highlight of the second half is the manifestation of Christ in the celebration of the Eucharistic meal. These two highlights should be seen as parallel with one another.

It is easy for Episcopalians (and others) to see the Eucharistic meal as the Main Event of the morning and to regard everything else as prelude. To do this, though, is to misunderstand the fullness of the revelation that we are receiving. We say that we are a people of the book and in a sense that's true. However, Jesus is not a book—he's a person. Like all people we are able to learn about him by encountering him in a variety of ways. Scripture gives us one angle of access

to Jesus. But it is incomplete if that knowledge isn't fleshed out with the Christ whom we meet in the sacraments. By the same token, we are in danger of misunderstanding the Living Jesus of our sacramental experience if our grasp of his identity and character is not deeply grounded in the words of scripture. The two major parts of the service both show us Christ.

THE SERVICES

The Eucharistic liturgies are collected together on pages 316-412.

[Traditional Language Preliminary Material]

An Exhortation

The Decalogue: Traditional

A Penitential Order: Rite One

[The Traditional Language Service]

Concerning the Celebration

The Holy Eucharist: Rite One

The Word of God

The Holy Communion

Eucharistic Prayer I

Alternative Form of the Great Thanksgiving

Eucharistic Prayer II

Offertory Sentences

Proper Prefaces

[Contemporary Language Preliminary Material]

The Decalogue: Contemporary

A Penitential Order: Rite Two

[The Contemporary Language Service]

Concerning the Celebration

The Holy Eucharist: Rite Two

Word of God

The Holy Communion

Eucharistic Prayer A

Alternative Forms of the Great Thanksgiving

Eucharistic Prayer B

Eucharistic Prayer C

Eucharistic Prayer D

Offertory Sentences

Proper Prefaces

Prayers of the People

Forms I-VI

The Collect at the Prayers

Communion under Special Circumstances

An Order for Celebrating the Holy Eucharist

The People and Priest

At the Great Thanksgiving

Form 1

Form 2

Additional Directions

Broadly speaking, there are four different ways of celebrating the Eucharist within this section: Rite I, Rite II, Communion under Special Circumstances, and An Order for Celebrating the Holy Eucharist. The first two (Rites I and II) are the normal liturgies for Sundays and holy days. The third, Communion under Special Circumstances, is reserved for those persons who cannot attend regular services, usually

due to hospitalization, sickness, or some other infirmity. The fourth, An Order for Celebrating the Holy Eucharist, is explicitly for irregular situations; the prayer book notes that it is not intended to serve as a principal service for a worshiping community.[1]

Second, note that the organization of the Rite I and II Eucharists are not strictly linear—especially the Rite II version. The Rite II Eucharist provides an outline of the service giving much of the material but, afterward, adds on five supplemental sections that may be used to fill in the service. In other words, if you try to read through the Rite II service starting on page 355, you will find yourself needing to flip to several other sections to read along with the whole service. So, what texts exactly are we missing here? Here's a chart of the Rite II service:

Reading through the Service	Jumping to another Place
Entrance rite (pp. 355-356)	
Collect of the Day (p. 357)	Collects: Contemporary (pp. 211-261)
Lessons (pp. 357-358)	The [Eucharist] Lectionary (pp. 888-931)
Sermon (p. 358)	
The Nicene Creed (pp. 358-359)	
The Prayers of the People	The Prayers of the People (pp.383-393); The Collect at the Prayers (pp.394-395)
Confession of Sin (pp. 359-360)	
The Peace (p. 360)	
The Holy Communion	Offertory Sentences (pp.376-377)
The Great Thanksgiving: Eucharist Prayer A (pp. 361-365)	Alternate Forms: Eucharistic Prayer B (pp.367-369); Eucharistic Prayer C (pp.369-372); Eucharistic Prayer D (pp. 372-376)
The Great Thanksgiving [start]	Proper Prefaces (pp. 377-382)
The Breaking of the Bread (pp. 364-365)	
[Post-Communion Prayer and Dismissal] (pp. 365-366)	

On the surface, this way of arranging things looks crazy! Why do this? The collects and the Eucharistic lessons had always been a separate section; the real change here is the addition of all the material from the creed on. We'll look at the why of it in a second, but I need to observe an important point first: Just because the service or the prayer makes a jump doesn't necessarily mean that you need to follow it!

This may seem odd, but it's not once you spend some time with the material that we're jumping to. The Offertory Sentence is just that—a sentence. And there's no congregational response; the priest says it. Our response is to dig out our wallet for the offering plates. This is the same situation with the collect at the end of the prayers: The priest picks one, and we say, "Amen." The priest definitely needs to know where to find the Proper Preface—and we should read them over and be familiar with them—but it's a sentence fragment. By the time you have found it in the book, the priest is likely on to the next part of the liturgy.

You should be seeing a theme here by this point. One of the great strengths of *The Book of Common Prayer* from its beginnings is that it includes all of the words: Everything the priest says, and everything the people say. There are no secret parts. Yes, some priests might have devotional prayers that they say to themselves, heard only by God and the altar party, but the whole content of the common prayer is printed in black and white. As lay people and members of the Body of Christ, we have access to all of these. We should read, learn, and know them—and definitely inwardly digest their meanings. But we don't always have to read along in the book at the time of the service; we can just listen to some of the words. Priests often have one advantage over laity when it comes to these things: ribbons. It's a lot easier to flip back and forth between these various parts if they are all marked out beforehand with properly set ribbons attached to the

spine of the book. Pew editions rarely have them; altar books always do.

The jumps that we need to follow are the ones where there is more than a sentence or two of content or we need to provide responses. There are two of these: the Prayers of the People and the Eucharistic Prayers (bolded in the chart on previous page). If you hang around the Church long enough, you will probably memorize the forms that get used the most—and I encourage that wholeheartedly—but until that time, these two jumps make sense. It might not even hurt to check the bulletin beforehand and mark these places so you are prepared. Who knows? You might even want to get yourself a couple of ribbons.

Having covered the logistics of these jumps, let's talk about the whys and wherefores.

One of the guiding principles of the revision that gave us our current prayer book is that diversity of form does not hinder unity in prayer. That is, we can pray using different forms and different words for the same service and still accomplish the same thing and express the same theology liturgically. Whereas in the past, a single service was given—actually, in the original English situation, it was *imposed* by means of the State with the full weight of law behind it—this revision multiplied options and enshrined diversity as a theological principle. Hence, Rite II gives us six different written forms for the Prayers of the People and four different Eucharistic Prayers.

Second, different prayers use different parts. Specifically, the Proper Preface changes according to the season or occasion in most of the Eucharistic Prayers, but not in Prayer C or Prayer D. They have their own fixed Proper Prefaces that are not meant to be swapped out.

Third, while Rite I and II are basically comparable in the Daily Office, the differences are more significant in the Eucharist. As with the Daily Office, Rite I retains a higher degree of continuity with the classical Anglican rites. To generalize, Rite I prayers tend to have a higher degree of penitential language—a greater acknowledgement of human sin and our need for grace—and also tend to draw closer connections between the Eucharist and the Passion of Christ than Rite II prayers. Conversely, Rite II prayers tend to emphasize the celebratory aspect of the Eucharist and to speak more broadly of the redemptive work of Jesus—they focus less on the Passion and include a greater sense of all of Christ's words and works.

Fourth, the six different Eucharistic Prayers should be seen as more or less complementary to one another. There are not great theological differences between them. Rather they should be seen as differing in emphasis. We'll talk about these emphases when we turn to the various prayers. On the whole, though, they should be seen as being in continuity with one another.

INTRODUCTORY MATERIAL

Rite I	Rite II	Required?	Variation
[Exhortation →]		Optional	None
Decalogue: Traditional	Decalogue: Contemporary	Optional	None
A Penitential Order: Rite I	A Penitential Order: Rite II	Optional	None

All of the Introductory material is technically optional. But there are perfectly good reasons to use it for specific occasions.

The Exhortation

The Exhortation is placed at the head of the Eucharistic material and, in a sense, serves as an introduction to all of it. While it is structurally placed alongside the Rite I material, it's not actually Rite I language. The introductory material doesn't give a very good sense of where it would be used, but a note within the services clarifies that it is used in place of the invitation to Confession.

The Exhortation exhorts the congregation to several different things, primarily to receive the Eucharist. It is well worth hearing or reviewing several times a year. After offering a brief reminder of the nature and purpose of the Eucharist, we are reminded of the dignity of the sacrament and the need for spiritual preparation for its reception. One of the concerns expressed in the move toward weekly communion was that people would see the sacrament as less precious if it were experienced more often. The Exhortation is a useful reminder of the need to view the Eucharist within the whole context of our lives and faith—and to remind us that the pattern of our lives ought to be worthy of the sacrament's grace. If you don't hear the Exhortation in church very often, it is worth seeking out on a regular basis to reflect upon it.

The Decalogue

The Decalogue is another term for the Ten Commandments. The Rite I Eucharist recommends either the Ten Commandments or the Summary of the Law. This is a particularly Anglican feature—the Decalogue isn't used this way in the historic Western Liturgy. The original reason for its inclusion was to make sure that the Ten Commandments were used liturgically. From the earliest days of the Church, a minimum standard of knowledge about the faith was reckoned as the

Ten Commandments, the Apostles' Creed, and the Lord's Prayer. Even throughout the medieval period when the services were in Latin, Church councils reminded clergy that they were required to teach these three things to the congregation in their mother tongue. Of these, the latter two appear at both Morning and Evening Prayer. If you are following the prayer book's rule of life, you will say these quite a lot—but the Decalogue has no equivalent liturgical rehearsal. As a result, it was introduced (likely following other Reformation liturgies) in the 1552 prayer book revision as a means of making sure that congregations heard it and learned it from regular use. Its use in the American prayer books has become more optional over successive revisions, and yet it still deserves a place within our liturgical memory.

The Penitential Orders

The Penitential Orders are a means for transferring the Confession of Sin and related material from the middle of the service to the beginning. The title of this section makes the material sound more penitential than it actually is; indeed, if you take a good, hard look at the words, you'll note that we're not really adding much additional penitential material. The opening dialogue is the same as the regular Eucharistic opening; the text of the confession is the same as what ordinarily follows the Prayers of the People. The only addition is the option to include the Decalogue and/or the Summary of the Law or another scriptural sentence. While this element may sound penitential, it is simply a means of reordering what's already in the service and adding in one or more scriptural pieces. The key thing here is that this is the only rubrically permissible method for including the Decalogue within the Rite II service.

THE WORD OF GOD

*Italics indicates optional use.

Rite I	Rite II	Required?	Variation
[hymn, psalm, or anthem]	*[hymn, psalm, or anthem]*	Optional	Weekly
Opening Greeting/ Response	Opening Greeting/ Response	Optional	Seasonal
Collect for Purity	*Collect for Purity*	Rite I: Yes Rite II: No	
[Ten Commandments]/ Summary of the Law		Optional	
(Kyrie or Trisagion) and/or Gloria	Gloria or Kyrie or Trisagion	At least one	Seasonal
Collect of the Day	Collect of the Day	Yes	Weekly
The Lessons	The Lessons	At least one	Weekly
[psalm, hymn, or anthem]	*[psalm, hymn, or anthem]*	Optional	
The Gospel	The Gospel	Yes	Weekly
The Sermon	The Sermon	Yes	
The Nicene Creed	*The Nicene Creed*	On Sundays and Major Feasts	
The Prayers of the People	[The Prayers of the People]	Yes	
Confession of Sin	*Confession of Sin*	May be omitted occasionally	
The Peace	The Peace	Yes	

This section, entitled "The Word of God," is the first half of the Holy Eucharist. It is sometimes called the ante-communion where the Latin *ante* designates the portion before the communion. I'm not a fan of this term because it implies that these elements are merely the warm-up and not integral elements of Communion as a whole. But they are!

As we established earlier, the first half of the service offers us a direct encounter with the person of Jesus Christ who is the true Word of God. The highlight of this half is the exposition of the Gospel. This term can refer either to the sermon and its interpretation of the Word of God for a given congregation or, more narrowly, can refer to the act of reading the Gospel Lesson aloud in a language understood by the people. Indeed, sometimes it's necessary to go with the more narrow definition. Even when the preacher delivers a dud of a sermon, the Gospel is still heard in its proclamation.

The other elements of this half of the service are structured around the Gospel to help us hear and respond to it most fully. The collect should help to set the scene liturgically as would various seasonal additions or deletions. The readings before the Gospel give us a better context for its message within the scope of God's prior relationship with humanity and in the Early Church's own understanding of Jesus. After the Gospel we recite the Nicene Creed and once again remind ourselves of the Church's guide for the proper interpretation of the scriptures. Lastly, the intercessory prayers come out of our sense of the world's need and the divine capacity to meet that need.

The First "Hymn, Psalm, or Anthem"

An introductory hymn usually opens the service and gives a liturgical space for an entrance procession. This is not required but is quite common. As with all hymns and anthems appointed, the hymn is usually connected to the readings or the season, but this isn't always possible or feasible.

Opening Greeting

The prayer book offers three opening greetings at the start of the Eucharist: an ordinary use opening, then special options for Easter and for Lent/penitential occasions. It is

good to remember, though, that a fourth opening greeting can be found in the service of Holy Baptism. The opening is the liturgical equivalent of saying "hello." As a result, there's no need for clergy to add a literal hello or some other sort of introductory greeting.

The rubrics on page 407 of the prayer book provide four possible spots for announcements: "before the service, after the Creed, before the Offertory, or at the end of the service." The opening greeting, therefore, is not the place for them.

The Collect for Purity

The Collect for Purity is a gem of Anglican devotion. In fact, it's important enough that it's worth quoting here:

> Almighty God, to you all hearts are open, all desires known, and from you no secrets are hid: Cleanse the thoughts of our hearts by the inspiration of your Holy Spirit, that we may perfectly love you, and worthily magnify your holy Name; through Christ our Lord. *Amen* (*The Book of Common Prayer*, p. 355).

Openly admitting to the God who knows our faults and shortcomings better than we do ourselves, we ask for the cleansing presence of the Holy Spirit that we might love and worship God rightly. It is appropriately one of our most beloved prayers. Originally a private prayer of the priest as part of the preparation for Mass in the Sarum missals, Archbishop Cranmer made an excellent choice in sharing it with the whole congregation. If you only memorize one collect in your life, this would be the one to pick. Rite I requires its use; Rite II leaves it optional.

Following the Collect for Purity in Rite I is space for either the Decalogue or Jesus' Summary of the Law. Rite II does not technically offer this same option unless the Penitential Order is being used.

The Gloria/Kyrie/Trisagion

The first principal element of the service is the song that appears at this point: the *Kyrie*, the *Trisagion*, or the *Gloria in Excelsis*. These are all hymns of praise sung or said corporately. Particularly when the Gloria is sung—but even when an alternative is used—this moment can be seen as the point where the gathered congregation purposely joins its voice to the great unceasing universal chorus of praise to God and to the Lamb. In this hymn, we stand alongside the angels who proclaimed "Gloria" at the birth of the savior in Bethlehem and the saints and martyrs whose prayers have been received before the throne of God. Some of the great choral settings of the *Gloria* directly evoke the experience of standing in the midst of celestial choirs, contributing to the solemnity of this moment.

The *Kyrie* is a simple cry to God for mercy that acknowledges our dependence upon divine grace. In its simplest form, it is the repetition of three brief sentences: "Lord, have mercy. Christ, have mercy. Lord have mercy." We have the option of using either English or Greek (*Kyrie, eleison*). This is a thoroughly biblical phrase. Suppliants ask for Jesus' help in the Gospels with these words, and the psalmists and prophets alike cry for help with them in the Greek translation of the Old Testament that was the Church's first Bible.

The *Kyrie* can be used as written in the prayer book, a simple alternation between priest and people, or it can be more elaborate: The Additional Directions allow its "threefold, sixfold, or ninefold form" (p. 406). The basic alternation written in the prayer book is the threefold form; in the sixfold, the priest or cantor sings a line and the congregation repeats it; in the ninefold, each line is said three times either in alternation or together before moving on to

the next line. While this may sound complicated, it's not—the hymnal gives examples of the sixfold version in S85, S88, S94, and S95; the other settings represent the ninefold form.

The *Trisagion* means three-times holy because this Eastern acclamation names God as holy in three different ways. Like the *Kyrie*, it can be used alone or repeated three times. Unlike the *Kyrie*, when it is repeated, the whole unit is repeated three times rather than each line. Again, the hymnal contains settings for both: S102 gives it once; the other settings (S99-S101) use the threefold repetition.

We already touched on the *Gloria* during our discussion of the Daily Office. Beginning with the words of the angels from Luke, the *Gloria* flows into the words of the Church and serves as the preeminent vehicle for joining us musically with the full heavenly host. Permission is given to substitute another song of praise, but this should be done sparingly—if at all. If substituting, the best options would be a hymn paraphrase (like #421, "All glory be to God on high") or a canticle like the *Te Deum* or the *Benedictus es*.

The rubric for the *Gloria* indicates that it should be used "when appointed," but it doesn't give any clues as to where these instructions might be found. It's tucked away in the Additional Directions on page 406. As usual, the directions are fairly permissive, giving latitiude for local interpretation or practice. Here are the directions for use of the Gloria in tabular form alongside the historic use:

Season	Prayer Book	Historical Use
Advent	Omitted during this season	Omitted during this season
Christmas	Every day in this season	Every day in this season
Epiphany	"as desired" (optional)	Sundays/feast days only
Lent	Omitted during this season	Omitted during this season
Holy Week	Omitted during this season	Omitted during this season
Easter	All Sundays, every day of Easter Week; other weekdays "as desired"	Every day in this season
Post-Pentecost	"as desired" (optional)	Sundays/feast days only

Simply put, the *Gloria* is for our big celebrations. Thus, we use it throughout our festal seasons, we omit it during our more solemn seasons, and we use it for feast days in the seasons in between. The *Kyrie* and *Trisagion*, rather than being specifically penitential, are understood as the usual or default options.

When the *Gloria* is omitted, either of the other two songs will take its place in Rite II. Rite I gives the option of using the *Kyrie* consistently (or the *Trisagion*) and adding the *Gloria* when appropriate, following traditional Anglican use.

The Collect of the Day

At this point, the Collect of the Day is prayed. As discussed earlier, the collects provide a great unifying moment that connects this particular Eucharist to the larger superstructure of Episcopal devotion. Sometimes the collect may establish a theme for the day's liturgy. However, between the reshuffling of collects in this prayer book and the introduction of the Revised Common Lectionary, themes in the collects rarely align neatly with the scriptural texts anymore.

The Lessons

Following the collect comes the Lessons, which offer quite a lot of variety. At the most basic, at least one non-Gospel Lesson is needed, along with a psalm or music, and a Gospel Lesson. Earlier prayer books had only one non-Gospel reading, almost always from a New Testament Epistle, and some Rite I services use one Epistle reading in continuity with this practice. However, since the introduction of the latest prayer book with its Eucharistic Lectionary—and especially with the adoption of the Revised Common Lectionary—most Eucharists include an Old Testament reading, a selection from a psalm, a New Testament reading, and a Gospel reading.

Some parishes include a hymn between the New Testament reading and the Gospel, but an Alleluia verse is also common, frequently serving as music for a procession if the Gospel is read from the midst of the congregation.

Just as we spent some time exploring the pattern of the Daily Office readings, it is worth discussing the pattern of the Eucharistic readings and about the purpose behind them.

In the Daily Office, we encounter biblical texts in the form of *pericopes* (pronounced per-i-ko-peés) or short sections. Nevertheless, the basic unit of encounter is of a book. That is, the Daily Office moves through entire books piece by piece—or at least hits the major representative points of each book—in sequential order. In the Eucharist, the basic level of encounter has classically been the pericope rather than the book. In the superseded one-year lectionary of the historic Western liturgy essentially shared by Roman Catholics, Anglicans, and some Lutherans, the Gospel and Epistle readings were selected based on how appropriate they were to a given liturgical occasion, the Gospels being selected without regard from all four Gospels. The orienting pattern was the liturgical year, not the narrative sequence of the book.

Consider a moment what this means. A Eucharistic liturgy that picks small sections out of scripture on the basis of appropriateness is not a tool suited for basic education in the scope of the scriptures; its primary purpose is not teaching the breadth of scripture. This is compounded by the fact that there were only two readings—an Epistle and a Gospel. The Old Testament was heard much more infrequently. Often there was a thematic correspondence within the two readings. The Epistle would serve in some way to illuminate something within the Gospel.

The reason for this difference in structure comes down to purpose. The purpose of the Daily Office Lectionary is catechetical—it serves to teach the breadth of scripture and

to give worshipers a familiarity with scripture on a basic level. The purpose of the Eucharistic Lectionary is mystagogical—it serves to delve deeply into one particular aspect of the mystery of Christ, usually one singled out or at least suggested by the season of the liturgical year. The two lectionaries were originally designed to work in intentional combination with one another. The Daily Office taught the broad scope of scripture, while the Eucharist focused on particular moments of encounter with Christ and assumed a prior familiarity with scripture gained from the Office.

The reformers of the liturgy in the mid-twentieth century chose to substantially overhaul the Eucharistic Lectionary. Instead of a one-year cycle that repeated year after year, the reformers moved to a three-year cycle. Instead of pulling the Gospel readings from all four Gospel books, they focused each year of the cycle on a single primary Gospel—either Matthew, Mark, or Luke—and reading them in sequence whenever possible and interweaving John across the three for festivals. Instead of a single non-Gospel reading, two were selected, one (usually) from the Old Testament, the other from the New Testament Epistles. In order to convey the scope, the Old Testament readings in the Season after Pentecost moved sequentially through a particular type of Old Testament book, a type that complemented the character of the year's selected Gospel. Anglicans and Roman Catholics eschewed an entirely sequential approach to the Old Testament, though, and developed another set of readings that connects the Old Testament Lessons to the Gospel pericope. Hence, we now speak of two tracks for the Season after Pentecost: a sequential set of Old Testament readings and a complementary set keyed to the Gospel.

Consider what is going on here: It is an attempt to be both catechetical and mystagogical, at the same time. Whether it's actually possible to achieve both at the same time is an open

question. If we criticize the two-year Daily Office Lectionary for missing quite a lot of scripture, it is mathematically obvious that a three-year Eucharistic Lectionary is going to miss a whole lot more. Furthermore, the attempt to structure the Gospel pericopes sequentially for the main part of the year obscures the liturgical principles for selecting them in other parts of it.

On the other hand, this form of three-year lectionary recognizes the reality that most people in our congregations are not praying through the scriptures in the Daily Office. It also gives the average person in the pew a broader familiarity with the Old Testament and lifts up some of the classic Bible stories that are disappearing from the vernacular of Western culture.

The Revised Common Lectionary is anchored around the Gospel reading. The three-year cycle appoints a primary Gospel for each year: Year A uses Matthew, Year B uses Mark, and Year C uses Luke. The Gospel of John appears on significant feasts and fills out a section of the summer of Year B to compensate for the shortness of Mark's Gospel. The First Reading is usually an Old Testament Lesson. Matthew, often considered the most Jewish of the Gospels and written in a rabbinic spirit, is paired with readings from the Old Testament Law—Genesis and Exodus. Mark is paired with readings from the historical books of Samuel and Kings. Luke, with its emphasis on social justice, is paired with the prophets, particularly Jeremiah. The chief exception to the First Lesson being from the Old Testament rule is Easter time; we hear from the book of Acts in this season, the events that happened to the Early Church after the time of the Ascension of Christ. The Second Lesson is always from a New Testament non-Gospel text—usually an Epistle, but Acts gets mixed in at points as well.

The Sermon

When the Early Church realized that it needed to formally expand its canon beyond the Old Testament, it addressed the issue by means of this question: What books do we read publicly in worship? This was the guiding criterion by which the dispersed church communities assessed the books that would be gathered into the New Testament and into our scriptures. This criterion underscores that, for Christians, our paradigmatic encounter with scripture is hearing it in the liturgy. Don't get me wrong: I think we need to read it, and we have to read it outside of worship in order to truly learn it and gain the most from it. But our most important encounter with scripture is hearing it proclaimed in the midst of the worshiping community. We hear it most completely for what it is in this context.

The sermon, then, should flow naturally from the presence of the scriptures within the liturgy. There are as many different approaches to preaching as there are preachers. However, a few basic principles should remain consistent across them. First, the sermon is a part of the liturgy, not a distinct and separate event apart from it. The sermon is located within a liturgical setting. The sermon and liturgy should inform one another or—at the least—not contradict one another. It follows from this that the sermon usually has some direct continuity with its liturgical surrounding. Typically, Episcopal sermons comment on the scriptures appointed for the day, especially the Gospel. Second, if the sermon is part of the liturgy, then it should try to accomplish the same basic thing as the rest of the liturgy. Whether the sermon emphasizes interpretation of the scriptures, teaching, or something else, its underlying aim should be mystagogical. That is, it should seek to open our eyes and hearts to some aspect of the mystery of

Christ. It should show us the work and person of Christ—for us, with us, in us, and through us.

In some traditions, the sermon is the service—or at least the greater part of it. That is not our tradition. The success of the service does not stand or fall on the sermon. The sermon is one element in the whole scope of the liturgy. That is no excuse for poor preaching, of course, but even if the sermon is a flop, the worship of God still goes on.

The Creed

The next element in this portion of the service is the Nicene Creed. As we have said before, the creeds (whether the Nicene or the Apostles') belong in relation to the scriptural readings and their interpretation because they are guides for the Church's interpretation. At this point, no matter how well or poorly the sermon was preached, we are reminded of the basic framework of our faith: the Triune God, Christ who took on our nature that all creation might be reconciled with God, and the ongoing work of the Spirit in the Church.

There are always a few who look askance at the presence of the Nicene Creed because it was not part of the fourth-century Eucharist and was a later introduction to the service. I know some clergy who omit it even when the prayer book requires it (all Sundays and other feast days), but I think that's a mistake. When I read through the missionary preaching that swayed Europe and brought it into the Christian fold, one of the fundamental patterns of proclamation was a rehearsal of the creed. In my corporate job, executives like to talk about the importance of an elevator pitch: a succinct summary of a product or a position. This is ours; the creed is, in essence, a Christian elevator pitch. It is not designed to persuade—that is not its function. Rather the creed conveys the heart of the Christian belief in a quick, easy-to-memorize framework. In

an increasingly secular culture, the creed stands as a great tool for thinking through how we answer questions about what Christians believe. Saying it weekly in the Eucharist establishes in us the fundamental framework of the faith.

The Prayers of the People

The Prayers of the People are a response to the Gospel call that we heard in the readings, the sermon, and the creed. Furthermore, the prayers also enact one of the central roles of the gathered community. As Christ both interceded for and directly intervened to address the ills of his people and the world, his gathered Body continues to raise these same concerns and to identify the broken and hurting places of God's world that cry for attention.

In order to ensure that our span of prayers is properly comprehensive, the prayer book establishes six areas of concern that must be addressed:

> The universal Church, its members, and its mission
>
> The nation and all in authority
>
> The welfare of the world
>
> The concerns of the local community
>
> Those who suffer and those in any trouble
>
> The departed (with commemoration of a saint when appropriate) (*The Book of Common Prayer*, p. 359).

Rite I provides a prayer in continuity with past prayer books that covers all of these areas. It feels more communal to me when, following the direction at the bottom of page 328, the leader ends each paragraph with "Lord in your mercy," allowing for a congregational, "Hear our prayer."

The six forms given between pages 383 and 393 incorporate these concerns as well and may be used in

either rite, adapting the language for Rite I. These forms are examples, and they can be freely adapted—if desired—to reflect the situations of local communities or to more closely connect them to the liturgical situation, provided they continue to cover all six of the required areas named on page 359.

Local adaptations should be done with care. I have heard some that were preachy—it seemed the priest was trying to fit into the prayers extra material that didn't make it into the sermon. Others turn to the gossipy, especially when the "concerns of the local community" are amplified with excessive detail. Still others can come across as consciousness-raising exercises where particular causes seem to dominate. The root problem with all of these is that the worship of God has taken a second place; the prayers have become speech to the gathered community rather than the gathered community's speech to God.

Confession of Sin

The invitation to Confession in Rite I serves as a great introduction to the next elements of the service: Confession, Absolution, and the Peace. The invitation calls for people to commit to making three changes in their lives:

> To "truly and earnestly repent you of your sins,"
>
> To be "in love and charity with your neighbors,"
>
> To "intend to lead a new life, following the commandments of God and walking from henceforth in his holy ways" (p. 330).

In the earlier prayer books, members of the congregation could leave at this point, and only those who desired to receive Holy Communion remained for the Confession and the Eucharist. Thus, this call was formerly extended to a self-selected set of the congregation. In its current location, the

invitation encourages the whole congregation to these three disciplines, which are put into practice with what follows.

The Confession of Sin is a response to the Gospel proclamation no less than the prayers are. The classic human response to an experience of the holy is to draw near with wonder. An inherent secondary response is to draw back in recognition of our own limitation and sin—signs of our separation from the holy. The Confession gives voice to this experience. Too often penitence has been structured or explained as the religious process of feeling bad about ourselves. This is not the point of the exercise at all. Instead, the Confession gives voice to a realistic appraisal of who we are in the face of the Holy God. The Confession in Rite II (there is also a Rite I version) is structured in a very specific way. At its center, the Confession is an exact reversal of the Summary of the Law. In the summary, we hear the words of Jesus exhorting us to, "Love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, with all your mind, and with all your strength" and "Love your neighbor as yourself" (*The Book of Common Prayer*, p. 351). In the Confession, we acknowledge that we have not done this; we acknowledge the reality of our human situation. We ask not only for forgiveness but also for the grace to do better. But note how we phrase this hope of doing better: It is not an intellectual change—it is not about knowing. Instead this hope is about embracing God's will with joy and then walking in his ways. This is a long-term, full-body response. It is not just thinking or doing; it is the whole body responding in faith using words that recall to us the vision of the faithful laid out in Psalm 15 and Psalm 26.

The Absolution is the Church's response to our congregational confession. The difference in wording between Rites I and II are worth exploring. The Rite II Absolution is characterized by certainty. There is nothing conditional here; it

is a straightforward assurance of pardon: "Almighty God have mercy on you...forgive you...strengthen you...keep you..." (p. 360). The Rite I Absolution begins differently: "Almighty God, our heavenly Father, who of his great mercy hath promised forgiveness of sins to all those who with hearty repentance and true faith turn unto him, have mercy upon you...pardon and deliver you...confirm and strengthen you... bring you to everlasting life" (p. 332). The relative clause that identifies God names a promise with certain requirements, namely that forgiveness is given to "all those who with hearty repentance and true faith turn unto him." We hear this absolution best when both versions are kept in mind. As we hear the Rite I version, we need to remember the assurance of pardon. As we hear the unconditional pardon of Rite II, we need to remember our duty to conform to the Confession we have just said and enact the pardon we have received.

The difference between the rites continues. Rite I follows the Absolution with one or more lines from scripture, referred to as the "comfortable words." These New Testament passages emphasize Christ's victory over sin on behalf of the whole world. They explicitly name the promises alluded to earlier.

The Peace

The final element in this part of the service is the sharing of the Peace. The significance of this action is much deeper than shaking the hands of the people around you; rather, we enact being "in love and charity with [our] neighbors." The Confession and Absolution have reconciled us with God; now we share active signs of our own reconciliation with our neighbors. Two Gospel passages should float through our heads at this point. The first is a direct reflection of what has just occurred. In Matthew's parable of the forgiven debtor (18:23-35), a king forgives a servant who owes him ten

thousand talents (a ridiculous amount of money, like saying a billion dollars today), but the servant turns around and demands from a fellow servant a hundred denarii (a much more reasonable sum, roughly a couple hundred dollars). The king then throws the first servant back in jail and demands the full amount because he has failed to learn the lesson of mercy. In the same way, our recognition of the forgiveness given to us by God demands a similar action on our part. The classic summary of this concept comes from a version of the Lord's Prayer: "Forgive us our debts as we forgive our debtors."

The second passage that should run through our heads leads us toward the next major portion of the service. Near the beginning of the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus says, "So when you are offering your gift at the altar, if you remember that your brother or sister has something against you, leave your gift there before the altar and go; first be reconciled to your brother or sister, and then come and offer your gift" (Matthew 5:23-24). We are at that point. We are about to offer our gifts at the altar. Jesus is reminding us that reconciliation with God is not a personal endeavor; it is social, communal. Our reconciliation with God is incomplete if we aren't actively seeking reconciliation with those around us.

To be honest, we tend not to emphasize this union between the Confession and the Peace very much, and there's a good reason for that—it's hard work! As much as I wish the hyperbolic overstatement in Psalm 51 were true—"Against you [God] only have I sinned and done what is evil in your sight" (*The Book of Common Prayer*, p. 656)—it's not. An honest confession of our sin reveals that we have sinned—in what we have done and in what we have left undone—against those around us and particularly against those to whom we are the closest. The sign of peace, whether an actual kiss, a hug, or shaking of a hand, ought to be a sign of our deeper commitment to set things right and to honor, value,

and love those closest to us. John's first Epistle neatly—and uncomfortably—concludes this for us: "Those who say, 'I love God,' and hate their brothers or sisters, are liars; for those who do not love a brother or sister whom they have seen, cannot love God whom they have not seen. The commandment we have from him is this: those who love God must love their brothers and sisters also" (4:20-21).

THE HOLY COMMUNION

Rite I	Rite II	Required?	Variation
Offertory	Offertory	Yes	As desired
[hymn, psalm, or anthem]	*[hymn, psalm, or anthem]*	Optional	Weekly (by service)
The Great Thanksgiving	The Great Thanksgiving	Yes	By prayer
The Lord's Prayer	The Lord's Prayer	Yes	None
The Breaking of the Bread/ Fraction Anthem	The Breaking of the Bread/ Fraction Anthem	Yes	As desired; by season
Prayer of Humble Access		Optional	
Distribution	Distribution	Yes	As desired
[hymn, psalm, or anthem]	*[hymn, psalm, or anthem]*	Optional	Weekly (by service)
Post-Communion Prayer	Post-Communion Prayer	Yes	By occasion
Blessing	Blessing	Optional	As desired; by season
Dismissal	Dismissal	Yes	As desired

Let me give you an initial perspective to frame our discussion as we move into Holy Communion. Gregory Dix, an Anglican Benedictine monk, in his monumental work, *Shape of the Liturgy*, gives us a key entrée into the spiritual heart of the Eucharist as a result of his study of countless Eucharistic prayers of the Eastern and Western Churches. No matter what else they might do or have, they all had these four fundamental actions in common: take, bless, break, give. On a basic structural level, it's easy to align these with the elements in the chart above. In the Offertory, the congregation brings offerings to the altar including the bread and wine. Then, the Eucharistic prayer is the blessing of these elements. The bread is broken at the Breaking of the Bread/Fraction Anthem, and then both elements—bread and wine—are given to the people at the Distribution.

The real genius and spiritual meat of Dix's observation, though, only comes with reflection. It's easy enough to match up his four actions with parts of the service. But to leave it at that misses deeper opportunities for reflection and growth. You see, no one action exhausts any particular element of the Eucharist. If we stop at the structural level, we fail to notice that these four actions tend to operate in each individual part of the Eucharistic act. There's a continual flow of these actions around and through the various parties enacting the Eucharist: When the priest gives the consecrated bread, we—the congregants—are taking (receiving) Christ's own blessing. To just call this Distribution or to say the bread is given limits us to a clerical perspective. The priest is giving, but what are we doing, what is Christ doing, where is the Spirit moving?

Likewise, within the Eucharistic prayer, when we join with the priest in blessing, we are also in the act of giving—our very souls and bodies. And in so doing, Christ is taking while the Spirit is also blessing. As you engage in the Eucharistic meal, the Eucharistic practice, you will see different aspects

come to the foreground as you are ready to see them and as you need to see them. What is required is a sense of the four fundamental actions in order to be attentive to them.

The Offertory

The Offertory is the point when the gathered community offers its material possessions for the good of itself and the world around itself. Despite what you might think, scripture—the New Testament in particular—has far more to say about possessions and what we do with them than it does about sex. Proper stewardship and the sharing of resources has been a hallmark of Christian teaching from the beginning (the book of Acts in particular makes this quite evident). This element gives us an opportunity to literally put our money where our mouth is. In the act of the Offertory, the congregation's gifts are received and then brought forward to the altar to be dedicated to God.

The Offertory Sentences explore the ideas of offering and sacrifice primarily through a lens of stewardship. What we have is what we have been given whether directly or indirectly by God in creation. Some priests raise the elements and say a prayer over them at this point; this isn't a pre-blessing but rather a prayer of thanks to God for giving us bread, wine, and sustenance that we are privileged to offer back. This prayer recognizes the inherent circularity in the act of giving a part of creation as a gift to the Creator.

The Great Thanksgiving

We now come to the pinnacle of the second part of the service, the great Eucharistic prayer. One of the most common ways of breaking down the prayer is dividing it into constituent parts. That is, there are subsections within the

various Eucharistic prayers that have certain roles that can help us understand what we're hearing and doing. A lot of writings on the Eucharist spend time on these subsections and on their historical development. As a result, when priests teach about the Eucharist, this part often gets emphasized—maybe even overemphasized—because this is how they were taught. It is easy to trace these parts and to see literary dependence between different kinds of Eucharistic prayers.

But fundamentally, the Eucharist isn't about literary dependencies. It is not about the history of the development of the text of the prayer either.

The Eucharist is a whole-body, multisensory experience where we remind ourselves who God is for us, in which we praise God in awe and wonder, and ultimately, we taste and see that the Lord is good. We receive Christ into ourselves so that we (all of us, together, the whole company of faithful people) may be received more deeply into him.

And that is why we look at the parts of the prayer—so that we can more clearly perceive within ourselves the fruits of his redemption.

These are the chief parts of the prayer (sometimes called the *anaphora* or *canon*):

The Opening Dialogue

The Thanksgiving (Preface)

The Sanctus (Holy, Holy, Holy) [stuck in the midst of the Thanksgiving]

The Words and Deeds of Jesus (Institution Narrative)

The Remembrance (Anamnesis)

The Offering (Oblation)

The Invocation of the Spirit (Epiclesis)

The Final Blessing (Doxology)

The Opening Dialogue

The Opening Dialogue is a brief interchange between the priest and the congregation. It is a ritual exchange where we acknowledge what we are about to do and make public profession of our unity in what follows. This dialogue begins with the standard exchange that is the normal liturgical greeting and response: "The Lord be with you"/"And also with you [And with thy spirit.]"

The call to "lift up your hearts" only appears in the Eucharist. There are a few different ways to understand this call. One is to see this phrase as a metaphor that invites us to be joyful. By lifting up our hearts, we are metaphorically lifting them from sadness and putting them into a more acceptable place proper for rejoicing. Another, favored by John Calvin among others, takes the phrase in a *spirito-spatial* sense. He understood this to be a reference to lifting our hearts upward into heaven and into the presence of the enthroned Christ.

The final exchange establishes an agreement about what we are all about to do together: In Greek, to give thanks is the verb *eucharistein* from which our word "Eucharist" comes. The response, whether it's the Cranmerian, "It is meet [fitting] and right so to do" or the modern phrase, "It is right to give him thanks and praise," is a word of agreement. In essence, the priest says, "Let's Eucharist now!" and our response is, "Yes, let's!" From this point on, the priest continues, but we are all committed to the words the priest says and are united in the priest's prayer. The priest is praying on our behalf and in consonance with our own silent prayers. We are not observers simply because we are not talking; we are full participants—or at least certainly should be. This is part of the agreement we are making. Another way to consider this is that, in the final exchange, we as the people of God are

extending our permission for the priest to give thanks to God in the midst of all of us on behalf of all of us. Even though the priest alone is talking, the Eucharist is never the act of a single person; in our church there is no such thing as a Eucharist offered by a priest alone. At least one other person is required. It is as the gathered Body of Christ that the Eucharist is offered, even if only a small group is gathered.

The Thanksgiving

The Eucharist is an experience, but it is not a strictly subjective one; we can't make it into whatever we think it ought to be. Instead, the priest begins with an act of thanks that reminds both God and us of the extent of our relationship up to this point. We are reminded of the intrinsic character of the God whom we are thanking.

Since we have just finished giving the priest permission to start thanking, the prayer logically proceeds in that vein. In most of our prayers, a Proper Preface is inserted at this point. (Again, these are gathered on pages 344-349 for Rite I; pages 377-382 for Rite II). Most seasons have their own Preface; on Sundays during green seasons there are three alternating options—Of God the Father, Of God the Son, and Of God the Holy Spirit. Some occasions get their own Prefaces—baptisms, marriages, ordinations, a few classes of saints, the dead. On regular weekdays, the prayer is written so the Preface can simply be dropped out. The Proper Prefaces thank God from a particular perspective and emphasize some special aspect of our relationship with God. The Seasonal Prefaces emphasize something that pertains to the season, using images, biblical allusions, or referring to biblical events prominent in the season's readings, tying the Eucharist back to the Calendar.

However the Preface goes—or even if it's left out altogether—it always concludes the same way. Our thanks

turns to praise, and we join our voices with the whole heavenly chorus.

The Sanctus

A joke was making the rounds a while ago when I was in seminary that went something like this:

> A Southern Baptist minister and an Episcopal priest ran into each other at the post office on Monday morning. The Baptist turned to the Episcopalian and said, "We had such a great day yesterday! We had over 300 people show up. A famous foreign missionary came and gave us the message. And that was just our Seeker Service!"
>
> "Wow, congratulations," his Episcopal colleague responded.
>
> "So, how'd you do?" the minister prompted.
>
> "Let me think..." said the priest. "We had the Maxwells, the Murphys and their kids, and Bill and Joe. Old Miss Wordward was there and so was her driver. And we had nine ranks of angels, 144,000 sealed out of the tribes of Israel, and then a great multitude that no one could number from every nation, tribe, people and language. Our Lord Jesus Christ came and gave us himself. And that was just our 8 a.m. Low Mass!"

In addition to poking gentle fun at denominational rivalries, I have always remembered this joke because it expresses something deeply true about our understanding of worship—especially sacramental worship.

The *Gloria* is the first angelic song of our service. The *Sanctus* is the second. Coming right after the invitation to "lift up our hearts," the *Sanctus* reinforces the notion that the Eucharist is occurring in a different spiritual space than our normal lives. We are now existing in a geography peopled by

saints, angels, and the hosts of the blessed dead. Or—better yet—it reinforces that there is something richer and deeper going on all around us of which we are usually unaware.

The word *Sanctus* is Latin for holy, and the text of this song comes from Isaiah's great vision of God in the temple recorded in Isaiah 6. In his vision, this was the song of the seraphim as they flew about the person of God: "Holy, holy, holy is the LORD of hosts; the whole earth is full of his glory" (6:3). Significantly, Saint John the Divine records a similar song from the four living creatures about the throne of God: "Holy, holy, holy, the Lord God the Almighty, who was and is and is to come" (Revelation 4:8). This second part of the song from Revelation conceptually leads into the second half of the *Sanctus*: "Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord."

A few things are going on here. First, it allows the liturgy to return to the song heard in Isaiah and to amplify it with the song heard in Revelation. These final words of the *Sanctus* take an incarnational turn: The coming of God in flesh names specific ways in which God's glory fills all of creation.

Second, these words are quoting Mark 11:9 and Matthew 21:9, which refer to Jesus. If Jesus hasn't already been brought into the picture by the Proper Preface, now he has. In our great act of communal blessing and thanking God as part of the greater chorus, our praise makes reference—if only indirectly, to the person of Jesus and reminds the priest to say more about him. Sure enough, the prayer usually takes a more Christological turn after this point. We are blessing him who will shortly come and bless us in his sacramental presence.

Third, in the Gospels, these words are from the lips of the crowd at the triumphal entry of Jesus into Jerusalem. This provided an ideal point of connection for the patristic and medieval interpreters who allegorized the Eucharist according to the life of Christ; at this point Jesus enters the holy city to be sacrificed.

And the Thanks Keep Coming

Some liturgical scholars speak of the Post-*Sanctus*. On one hand, the name makes sense because this is the part that literally comes after the *Sanctus*. However, this naming can cause confusion about what's actually going on.

Here's the problem that I have with it: The title, Post-*Sanctus*, creates the sense that we're doing something different now than what we were before—and that's not the case. The priest is still engaging in the same basic act of thanks. Furthermore, when we start breaking things up into elements, it can appear like we have three separate things: A Thanksgiving, the *Sanctus*, and the Post-*Sanctus*. When we see these three as a conceptual unity (which they are), then we better understand that the *Sanctus* too is an inherent part of our complete act of thanksgiving.

As prompted by the congregational reminder in the second part of the *Sanctus*, the object of thanks focuses on what God has done for us specifically in and through the person of Jesus. God's work of creation often appears here, but the real move is to the person of Christ.

The Words and Deeds of Jesus

At this point we shift from Jesus in general to a vignette of Jesus in particular. The previous section invoked the broader work of redemption, largely centered on the cross. Here, we focus on the pivotal moment at the dinner Jesus shared with his disciples before his death.

We know this part goes back to the very beginning of what Christians do together. Of all the writings that we have, the letters of Paul are the earliest. While dating the writings of the New Testament is a fairly tricky business, we know that Paul was writing in and around the year 51 CE. Indeed, as best as

we can tell, his letters were committed to paper ten to twenty years before the Gospels themselves were being circulated. As a result, the earliest, still-surviving, written testimony we have to Jesus Christ, who he was, and what he did on this earth, is preserved for us in 1 Corinthians:

> For I received from the Lord what I also handed on to you, that the Lord Jesus on the night when he was betrayed took a loaf of bread, and when he had given thanks, he broke it and said, "This is my body that is for you. Do this in remembrance of me." In the same way he took the cup also, after supper, saying, "This cup is the new covenant in my blood. Do this, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of me." For as often as you eat this bread and drink the cup, you proclaim the Lord's death until he comes (11:23-26).

This moment is central for who we are and for who we are together. It's easy for us to become numb to certain words and actions, and these are no exception. We become used to hearing them and lose sense of how radical they are. If I had to focus on a single word to rekindle the wonder that lives within it, it would be covenant. In classical Hebrew, you don't make a covenant. Instead, the proper turn of phrase is to cut a covenant. Genesis 15 shows Abraham cutting a covenant with God, and it involves cutting animals in half as part of the ritual action! Covenant-cutting is part of what God does. God commits reconciliation with creation by means of covenants, solemn promises between the divine and the created (including humans). Here at dinner, Jesus commits to a new covenant cut in his own blood, by means of his blood. The symbolic action will become literal in a few short hours. And yet the great movement to which all of this is driving is not fundamentally about blood and death but about consummating a reconciliation.

But this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, says the LORD: I will put my law within them, and I will write it on their hearts; and I will be their God, and they shall be my people. No longer shall they teach one another, or say to each other, "Know the LORD," for they shall all know me, from the least of them to the greatest, says the LORD; for I will forgive their iniquity, and remember their sin no more (Jeremiah 31:33-34).

And I saw the holy city, the new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband. And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, "See, the home of God is among mortals. He will dwell with them; they will be his peoples, and God himself will be with them; he will wipe every tear from their eyes. Death will be no more; mourning and crying and pain will be no more, for the first things have passed away" (Revelation 21:2-4).

As Christians, we stand as people, witnesses, of this new covenant. In these words, we hear this new covenant proclaimed week after week. And yet our struggle is to hear it again and again, to take its call to heart again and again, to step into the world that it offers us at our fingertips, closer to us even than our hands and our feet.

The Remembrance

Having heard again the words of Christ, we are struck by the repetition of remembrance. After the bread, after the wine, Jesus enjoins his disciples gathered with him—and that is us too—to do this, the act of taking, blessing, breaking, and giving, in memory of him. Accordingly, we echo in return an act of remembrance. But what exactly are we remembering? Nothing exact, if our prayers are anything to go by. That

is, we are not just remembering a poignant moment before he died; we're not just remembering his death. Rather our memory encompasses in a flash the whole sweep of the Great Three Days. It includes not just his death, not just his descent among the dead and his redemptive work there, but also his resurrection and ascension, his promise to come again, as well as the totality of who and what he was, is, and will be for us.

The Offering

Here we speak in prayer what we acted out at the start of this particular movement. In a choreographed moment (the Offertory) that we initially labeled as a take, the prayer reveals it to be a give, but—oddly—in the act of giving, we shall receive, and it will be a blessing.

In the Offering, the priest prays the elements back to God and, in doing so, lays bare what we're really offering here: ourselves. At the end of the day, this isn't about bread and wine. It's about the greater transformation into the fullness of God. It is about us being transformed. But not just us, either. It's about the whole created order being transformed back toward the image and ideal in and through which it was created in the first place. It's that reconciliation business yet again.

The Invocation of the Spirit

The invocation of the Holy Spirit should remind us of where we find ourselves. Remember, in a very real sense, we have been invited into the interior dialogue of the Holy Trinity. As members of the Body of Christ and incorporate within him, we are participants in his own self-offering to the Father through the Spirit. Sometimes—and here especially—

our invocation of the Spirit isn't truly an invoking in the proper sense. To invoke is to call; we're not actually calling the Spirit; the Spirit is here! Rather, we are being proper in acknowledging one in whose presence we stand. And again, because it's proper, not because we control it or direct it, we request the Spirit to do what it does in sanctifying the gifts and us.

The Final Blessing

We conclude the prayer with a final note of thanks. Acknowledging what we are doing, we attempt to wrap words around the Triune confluence of Father, Son, and Holy Spirit within which we have been privileged to participate. We have some fun with prepositions as we struggle to adequately describe our perception of the glory of Christ toward the Father—"by him, with him, in him." And of course the Spirit of whom we have just spoken is unifying and binding the act into a worthy garland of praise.

The prayer comes to an end with a great "Amen." This Amen is our collective assent to the communal prayer that the priest has just voiced. Just as the prayer begins with agreement that it is by all, for all, though through the mouth of one, so the Amen confirms the unity of our collective prayer. These amens are the only ones in the prayer book printed in all caps. They remind us visually of their importance and the emphasis that they deserve.

On that Ping Moment

Now that we have finished the run-through of the Eucharistic prayer, we have to pause. We have to talk about the "ping."

This is something liturgists love to fight about.

When do the elements, the bread and wine, really become Jesus? When is the moment at which the sacramental presence becomes present in a way that it wasn't before? A favorite professor of mine liked to call this the ping moment. So, where do we look?

There are three good options: 1. The words of institution when the priest recalls Jesus' own words over the bread and wine, 2. the invocation of the Spirit, and 3. the final Amen. Naturally, different groups have lobbied for different options.

The Western Church typically goes with the first option. The whole reason that the host is elevated in the Roman Catholic Mass at the words of institution is so the congregation can adore Christ who is then present in a way he wasn't before. When Martin Luther reformed the Mass, he basically took out everything except the words of institution, and for generations, this was the only part of the classic prayer that Lutherans used. For Luther, it was all about the promise of Christ to be present when the Word of the Gospel is joined with the elements: That's when the magic happens.

The Eastern Church tends to go with option two. The invocation of the Spirit is what accomplishes the change, they will tell you. The priest doesn't make anything, God does; therefore, it's the action of the Spirit that effects the fundamental transition into the fullness of the Eucharistic presence.

A classic Anglican position likes the third option. If we didn't need the whole prayer, why would we have the whole prayer? Besides, consecration is a function of celebration, not a mechanical action. As a result, the whole prayer should be seen as a collective and coherent act of consecrating the elements.

Thankfully, although faced with an array of three possible options—all with good reasons to back them up—I can give

you the single correct answer: It fundamentally and truly doesn't matter.

Or more accurately: It doesn't matter *when* it happens; it matters *that* it happens.

We honestly don't know when the ping happens, and it's not worth fighting over. What is much more important is that we locate a movement of the greater presence of Christ in our midst at some point within this action. If it helps you to see it at a particular point, then by all means, embrace that. If it doesn't matter to you, leave it at that. For me, I'm an option one kind of guy. A good friend who was raised Pentecostal will always be a number two. And that's fine. Neither of us can prove our point and for the sake of our own devotion and the sake of growing more deeply into the mystery of Christ, we don't need to prove it. The when is not as important as the connection itself. The lack of a definite when can become an opportunity. You are open to explore this yourself: Which moment—or set of moments—feels most powerful and holy to you? When do you feel Christ or the presence of the Spirit most fully? Listen for that. Be attentive. And know that it doesn't have to be one point for all time either: You might find it at different places as you proceed in your spiritual journey.

THE LORD'S PRAYER

As a fitting conclusion to our great prayer of the service, we then pray together the Lord's Prayer. A standard element in most Christian services, we shouldn't be surprised to find it in the Eucharist. The question, though, is why here? Why now? Why not at the end of the Prayers of the People, as in the Daily Office? In one sense, we are continuing the theme

of Christ's conversation with the Father. We, as the Body of Christ, are praying his own prayer. But I think something more particular is going on with its placement. When we pray this prayer at this moment in the service—after the prayer but before the distribution—it changes the way we hear the line at its center: "Give us this day our daily bread." An obvious association is made between the petition for bread and the Eucharist, the bread from heaven.

The question is: How long afterward will this meaning linger? Does saying the prayer at this point and experiencing this particular interpretation of the text alter it for us and become our instinctive understanding of the line? It's hard to say. Perhaps we might understand it this way: This placement certainly suggests a meaning. While not closing off other interpretations of the line, it invites us to see the request being fulfilled within the Eucharist.

THE BREAKING OF THE BREAD/FRACTION ANTHEM

Now we come to the worst-kept moment of silence in The Episcopal Church.

After the heading "The Breaking of the Bread," the prayer book gives two short sentences as directions: "The celebrant breaks the consecrated Bread. A period of silence is kept." After fifteen years of attendance at Episcopal services, I can't recall more than a few when the time between the breaking of the bread and the start of the Fraction Anthem could justifiably be referred to as a period. Most of the time, there is no pause—one sentence runs right into the other. And that's a shame. This is one of the few places where the prayer book actually mandates silence, and it is a good point for reflection.

At this point we have the words said or sung around the breaking of the bread. This is often called the Fraction Anthem. It's quite common to have a double anthem at this point. The priest says, "Christ our Passover is sacrificed for us," and our response, "Therefore let us keep the feast," is an anthem; however, it's common to immediately thereafter have either a choral or a congregational fraction anthem, perhaps a version of "Lamb of God" or another sung fraction. From a technical perspective, this is redundant. On the other hand, two different ideas are being expressed. Indeed, the Rite I service includes both texts—the Christ our Passover and the *Agnus Dei*—even though the Rite II text only contains the Christ our Passover.

The Christ our Passover anthem holds together the notion of the sacrificial meal. It underscores the notion of sacrifice—as controversial as that still remains in Protestant circles—but proceeds immediately to the meal. The fact of the sacrificial death does not end the sacrificial act; harking back to the Homeric, the meal needs to to follow.

The Lamb of God anthem, on the other hand, contains the concept of sacrifice but makes the turn toward the expiation of sin. It's a more introspective response but one that deserves to be heard in relation to the other.

The prayer book doesn't contain any other Fractions, although it gives permission for others; the hymnal, on the other hand, has quite a few more. In addition to the two already mentioned, it also has:

The disciples knew the Lord Jesus (S167)

My flesh is food indeed (S168-9)

Whoever eats this bread (S170)

Be known to us (S171)

Blessed are those who are called (S172)

All adaptations of New Testament readings, these additions give us more perspectives into the meal that we are about to receive. There can be a practical purpose for these as well—particularly when several patens and chalices need to be prepared or a large altar party communed before moving to the rest of the congregation. These anthems help us reflect and focus on what we have done and are about to continue while allowing time for the elements to be made ready.

PRAYER OF HUMBLE ACCESS

Rite I offers the Prayer of Humble Access (p. 337) as an option; Rite II does not mention it at all. In a very real sense, this prayer has become something of a litmus test for those who either champion or decry the liturgical shifts away from the 1928 status quo. For fans of the new approach, the Prayer of Humble Access seems overly penitential. With its bald assertion that "we are not worthy so much as to gather up the crumbs under thy Table" (*The Book of Common Prayer*, p. 337), the prayer seems to dismiss the real consequences of grace, redemption, and reconciliation. Others, conversely, see its absence as a sign of spiritual arrogance and as the Church's capitulation to a culture of entitlement that believes it deserves anything it wants. The proper question focuses around the we—who is this we? Is this the we before, after, or apart from God's grace?

Two things here: First, I must say, reading the troublesome line in context helps. The sentence right before it—the one with which the prayer opens—is this: "We do not presume to come to this thy Table, O merciful Lord, trusting in our own righteousness, but in thy manifold and great mercies." The first line, therefore, draws a contrast between humanity's

own efforts toward righteousness and the abundant mercies of God. The next sentence is logically read to mean that by our own efforts and merits, we don't measure up. As Cranmer penned this prayer in the sixteenth century, I'm sure he heard echoing in his ears Martin Luther's teaching on original sin: that it consists of the basic inability to love, fear, and trust God as we should. Therefore, Luther taught, even if we outwardly act in accordance with all of the commandments, we will still fail to satisfy them if we are not loving, fearing, and trusting with our whole hearts. That's the intention here and the ground of our unworthiness apart from the grace of God.

Remember, though, the first sentence ends with the reminder that we don't have to measure up. We don't come to the table on our own nor do we have to earn our spot. Rather, we are called by the "manifold and great mercies" of God. The first sentence has a balance to it that starts with our efforts and moves to God. Classically, our next two sentences were one sentence connected together that echoed the structure of the first moving, again, from us ("We are not worthy...") to God ("Thou art the same Lord whose property is always to have mercy").

Pulling the line out of context is a perfect recipe for misunderstanding the concept and the theology behind it.

Second, I want to remind us of Rudolf Otto's discussion about the human experience of the holy. An inevitable part of that experience is the impact caused by a recognition of the gulf between Creator and creature. This language of unworthiness is part and parcel of trying to wrap human language around the experience of finding oneself in the presence of the Holy. Like all attempts at this kind of language, it falls short. When this inadequacy is coupled with an atrophied sense of the holy, the prayer's language can feel

unnaturally or improperly penitential. Our greatest remedy to overcoming the obstacle is not to chuck the prayer but to recognize and embrace its diagnostic function as a guide back to cultivating our own sense of the holy.

I understand that this sixteenth-century wording collides with the late twentieth-century conversation about the psychological importance of self-worth. I'm all for healthy self-confidence. But, as with Confession, the point of the prayer comes back to the reality of the human condition, especially when it is put in perspective with the reality of God. We have sinned. We do sin. We hurt ourselves and the people whom we love. We have not lived up to our covenant promises to God. And yet the God who reveals himself at the table and in the breaking of the bread is revealed to be a God of manifold and great mercies who will not stop calling us back to himself and will not rest until we evermore dwell in him, and he in us.

Third, the reference to the crumbs is another multivalent scriptural reference. We are borrowing the words of the Syrophoenecian woman in Mark who acknowledges her unworthiness to receive the benefits of Jesus and who turns his heart.[2] It also reminds us of the many leftovers in the great feeding stories—crumbs that fill entire extra baskets. Further, there is even a faint echo of the manna gathered by the Children of Israel as they wandered in the deserts, the bread from heaven that saved them from perishing in their exile. This prayer, with its reference to crumbs, draws on that rich scriptural tradition and ties the central act of Eucharist to the entire arc of salvation history.

DISTRIBUTION

At this point, the priests and the congregation receive the consecrated elements. There are various phrases that can be used, all of which emphasize a special sacramental presence of Christ in the moment.

> The Body (Blood) of our Lord Jesus Christ keep you in everlasting life. [*Amen.*]
>
> The Body of Christ, the bread of heaven. [Amen.]
> The Blood of Christ, the cup of salvation. [Amen.]
>
> The Body of our Lord Jesus Christ, which was given for thee, preserve thy body and soul unto everlasting life. Take and eat this in remembrance that Christ died for thee, and feed on him in thy heart by faith, with thanksgiving.
>
> The Blood of our Lord Jesus Christ, which was shed for thee, preserve thy body and soul unto everlasting life. Drink this in remembrance that Christ's Blood was shed for thee, and be thankful.[3]

The words aren't the main thing here. The main thing is receiving the sacrament.

Thanks to the opening title sequences of the TV show, *Iron Chef*, my family is well-acquainted with the crowning quotation from French lawyer, politician, epicure, and early theorist of a low-carb diet, Jean Anthelme Brillat-Savarin: "Tell me what you eat, and I will tell you what you are."

It's that moment. If ever that phrase had a deep, philosophical, existential reference, it is this point.

Tell me what you eat, and I will tell you what you are.

WHAT DO YOU FEEL?

So, what should you feel when you receive Communion?

My mother told me as a child that if you didn't feel anything, you hadn't spiritually prepared yourself. Now that I'm a grown-up and have lived with this for quite some years, I don't think that's quite right. (Sorry, Mom!)

It's not a question of how you should feel. We get into danger when we start placing emotional requirements onto religious experiences. When we do that, we start creating expectations. If these expectations somehow aren't met, or if we question whether they were met enough, then we can spiral into some unhealthy territory while we attempt to sort through what we did wrong. We start asking why God doesn't like us enough to let us feel what we are supposed to feel.

Conversely, having specific emotional expectations of the experience leads to the creation of tactics to either meet them or to exploit them. We can fall into this trap ourselves, but it gets even worse when worship leaders decide that they need to make sure everybody feels the appropriate feeling. Then we slip into various forms of emotional and spiritual manipulation.

The better question isn't "what *should* you feel" but "what *do* you feel?"

For me, the time after receiving Eucharist is a moment for awareness and for, literally, communion. What am I feeling? What am I thinking? How is God speaking to me in the midst of this very intimate experience? These are very real questions. Because I am a thinking-oriented person by nature, I generally don't take enough time with exploring my feelings. But this is precisely the time to do that.

The prayer book allows hymns, psalms, or anthems during the administration of Communion. Some people say that the whole congregation should participate in this sung

element—and that this is preferable to an individualistic act of prayer. Don't be pulled into others' expectations. This is your time of communion with God whom you have taken into yourself. If you are moved to sing along, do so. But sing because you want to and because it's expressing where you are, not because you have to. If you feel called to stay in prayer, do it.

My practice is usually to kneel and feel for a bit, then to pray the prayer appointed for After Receiving Communion:

> O Lord Jesus Christ, who in a wonderful Sacrament hast left unto us a memorial of thy passion: Grant us, we beseech thee, so to venerate the sacred mysteries of thy Body and Blood, that we may ever perceive within ourselves the fruit of thy redemption; who livest and reignest with the Father and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. *Amen* (*The Book of Common Prayer*, p. 834).

Note that this prayer isn't about what we feel. Instead, it asks God to give us the grace to properly venerate the sacrament. Venerate here means to hold it in honor, to respect it in all its forms, and to give it the full attentiveness the sacrament deserves as a central mystery of our faith. The result of this veneration is that we might be enabled to perceive the fruits of Christ's redemptive work within ourselves. Notice here what we're saying. We are not asking for grace to be redeemed. Nor are we asking for grace to feel redeemed. Instead, we are asking for a grace of perception. The prayer acknowledges that whether we feel it or not, whether we perceive its fruits or not, Christ's redemption is already at work in us. We are asking to be allowed to see the products of the work of inner transformation that Christ is already working in us.

Brillat-Savarin's quote was paraphrased in the 1920s by nutritionist and salesman Victor Lindlahr into its more common form: "You are what you eat." There's a subtle

difference between the original and this form, and I think this one works better here.

Between the bread of life, the cup of salvation, and the fruits of redemption, it's shaping up to be quite a meal.

POST-COMMUNION PRAYER

There are two forms of the Post-Communion Prayer in Rite II, one of which is a direct descendent of the prayer used in Rite I. Depending on which one you're praying, they weave together many of the themes that we have touched on (and will talk about again later in the book). The prayers have two main components. First, they give thanks for what we have received. We give thanks for the gift of the sacrament and for what that means corporately—that we are part of the household of God. Second, they acknowledge that we have to go out and act like the household of God. God has given us work to do—his own work of reconciliation—and in this meal we are strengthened to go forth and accomplish it. In doing so, we demonstrate with our lives our connection with the household of God, that we are board-mates with Christ. Showing up on Sunday and coming to the table isn't the point; doing the will of the One who sends us is the point.

BLESSING

The blessing either by the priest or bishop moves this thought along. If our Acclamation at the beginning of the service was the priest's liturgical hello, this is the priest's liturgical goodbye. Properly and appropriately it comes in a Trinitarian formula, and there are seasonal variations available in *The Book of Occasional Services* and elsewhere.

DISMISSAL

The deacon—in places where there is one—also has an official liturgical goodbye. Like the priest's blessing, like the post-communion prayer, the Dismissal has two key aspects: We are God's, and he has some work for us to do. Our work in worship is directly connected to our work in the world.

Our response, "Thanks be to God," is our liturgical goodbye. It also stands as an act of thanks, an act of praise, and an acknowledgement of the charges that we have been given. In Easter, extra alleluias are added in consonance with Easter's general theme of rejoicing; during Lent the more sober, "Let us bless the Lord," is suitable.

CHAPTER 10
THE BODY OF CHRIST

Disciplining yourself to exercise regularly is an effort. As an effort, as a discipline, we need to have reasons and purposes to keep at it: to crawl out of bed at an entirely unreasonable hour; to pause in the middle of our day to sweat; to push through that last set of repetitions that our muscles scream against. There are many reasons why people push through those obstacles to exercise. Too, there are many reasons that people tell themselves why they do it. (The "why" and the "what we tell ourselves" aren't always the same—the human mind is like that.)

Let me be clear. I tell myself that I exercise for my health, to maintain stamina, and to keep a well-functioning body as I move through middle age. But I would be lying if I said that how I look in the mirror in a semi-clothed state has nothing to do with it. I know vanity is not really a praiseworthy motivation. As somebody who studies this stuff, I realize the irony of being motivated by one of the classical vices. However, even without that perspective, there are a couple of good reasons why vanity is not a great motivator.

First, appearances can be deceiving. As we are well aware, a slender body (or a buff one, for that matter) does not