

THE ANCIENT CHURCH

8. Worship in the Ancient Church

A. Ancient Church Worship Was Liturgical

1. What do we mean by the word "Liturgy"?

The Early Church spoke of worship as *leitourgia* from which we get our word "liturgy," and which literally means "the work of the people" (see Acts 13:2: "As they ministered [*leitourgountōn*] to the Lord and fasted, the Holy Spirit said..."). The ancient Christians thought of worship as the holy work we do together as we assemble as a community of faith. It is the service we do *for God*, not the service performed for those who come to "experience" worship. By its very nature, liturgy is a communal act. It's the idea that a congregation isn't just a collection of individuals praying singularly in the same place, but it is a community of people who, by joining together in common prayer, manifest themselves as the Body of Christ in their service to God. So *the* liturgy refers to the written words and ceremonial forms by which a congregation offers this collective work in the public worship of God." (Fr. Jerry Kistler, *How in the World Did I Get from This to This?*, pp.70-71).

2. All corporate worship is liturgical

3. A basic principle of ancient thinking about worship: *Lex Orandi, Lex Credendi*

B. How Do We See that, from New Testament Times, the Ancient Church Used Fixed Forms for Worship?

1. Matt. 6:9ff; Lk. 11:2ff

2. Acts 2:42

3. The ancient "shape" of the liturgy

"The primitive core of the [ancient Eucharistic] liturgy falls into two parts—the *Synaxis* (a Greek word which means properly simply a 'meeting') and the *Eucharist*

proper (or 'thanksgiving'). These were separate things, which had a different origin. The synaxis was in its shape simply a continuation of the Jewish synagogue service of our Lord's time, which was carried straight over into the Christian church by its Jewish nucleus in the decade after the passion. The eucharist on the contrary was of direct Christian development; though this too had a Jewish background in the Passover sacrifice-meal, in the *kiddush* or religious meal of the household with which the Sabbath and the great feasts began, and more particularly in the common meals with a devotional purpose held by Jewish religious brotherhoods (*chaburoth*). But whatever its Jewish setting and pre-history may have been the Christian eucharist as such derived from the last supper" (Gregory Dix, *The Shape of the Liturgy*, p. 36).

4. Christ's Words of Institution

Jesus' Words of Institution that have always been the central part of the celebration of the Eucharist:

I Cor. 11:23-25 – "For I received from the Lord that which I also delivered to you: that the Lord Jesus on the same night in which He was betrayed took bread; and when He had given thanks, He broke it and said, 'Take, eat; this is My body which is broken for you; do this in remembrance of Me.' In the same manner He also took the cup after supper, saying, 'This cup is the new covenant in My blood. This do, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of Me.'"

C. Later 1st Century Liturgy

The Didache (c. 70-100 AD Syria or Palestine), or *The Teaching of Jesus to the Twelve Apostles*, is the earliest record of Christian liturgy outside of the New Testament.

"Now concerning the Eucharist, give thanks as follows:

First concerning the cup:

'We give you thanks, our Father, for the holy vine of David your servant, which you have made known to us through Jesus, your servant; to you be the glory forever.'

And concerning the broken bread:

'We give you thanks, our Father, for the life and knowledge which you have made known to us through Jesus, your servant; to you be the glory forever. Just as this broken bread was scattered upon the mountains and then was gathered together and became one, so may your church be gathered together from the ends of the earth into your kingdom; for yours is the glory and the power through Jesus Christ forever.'...

“And after you have had enough, give thanks as follows:

‘We give you thanks, Holy Father, for your holy name which you have caused to dwell in our hearts, and for the knowledge and faith and immortality which you have made know to us through Jesus your servant; to you be the glory forever...’

D. Evidence from the Third Century

1. Our primary sources are Hippolytus (170-235), for Rome, the *Didascalia*, or Teaching of the Twelve Holy Apostles and Disciples of Our Savior” (c. 230), for Syria, Clement of Alexandria (150-215) and Origen (c. 185-254), for Egypt.

2. Elements in the Third-Century Eucharistic Liturgy:

a. The Salutation – “The Lord be with you...” (Ruth 2:4; 2 Tim. 4:22)

b. *Sursum Corda* – “Lift up your hearts. We lift them up unto the Lord”

Cyprian (c.210-258), the bishop of Carthage, said in his treatise on the Lord’s Prayer: “*Let every carnal and worldly thought depart, and let the mind dwell on nothing other than that alone for which it prays. Therefore, the priest also before his prayer prepares the minds of the brethren by first uttering a preface, saying: ‘Lift up your hearts,’ so that when the people respond: ‘We lift them up to the Lord,’ they may be admonished that they should ponder on nothing other than the Lord.*”

“It was developed...as a preface to the Lord’s Supper to accent the spirit of thanksgiving. It is found everywhere in all the liturgies after Cyprian” (Robert Webber, *Worship Old and New*, 61).

c. *Sanctus* or *Trisagion* – “Holy, Holy, Holy...”

“The first allusion to its use in Christian worship is made by Clement [of Rome] (A.D. 96) in his letter to the Corinthians. ...it was in wide usage by the third century. It was used in during the Lord’s Supper and marks the beginning of the special prayer of thanksgiving (the eucharistic [or consecration] prayer) (Webber, p. 62).

d. *Kyrie eleison*, etc.

“Ancient sources also mention the use of the *Kyrie eleison* (Lord, have mercy) as well as the ‘thanks be to God’ after Scripture readings and the ‘Amen’ after prayers. The Lord’s Prayer was also frequently used after the prayer of consecration (of the bread and wine)” (*Ibid.*, p. 62).

3. What would a typical liturgy from the Third Century look like?

Webber makes the following reconstruction:

THE LITURGY OF THE WORD

Lections: Law, Prophets, Epistles, Acts, Gospels, Letters from bishops
Psalms sung by cantors between the lections
Alleluias
Sermon, or sermons
Deacon's litany for catechumens and penitents
Dismissal of all but the faithful

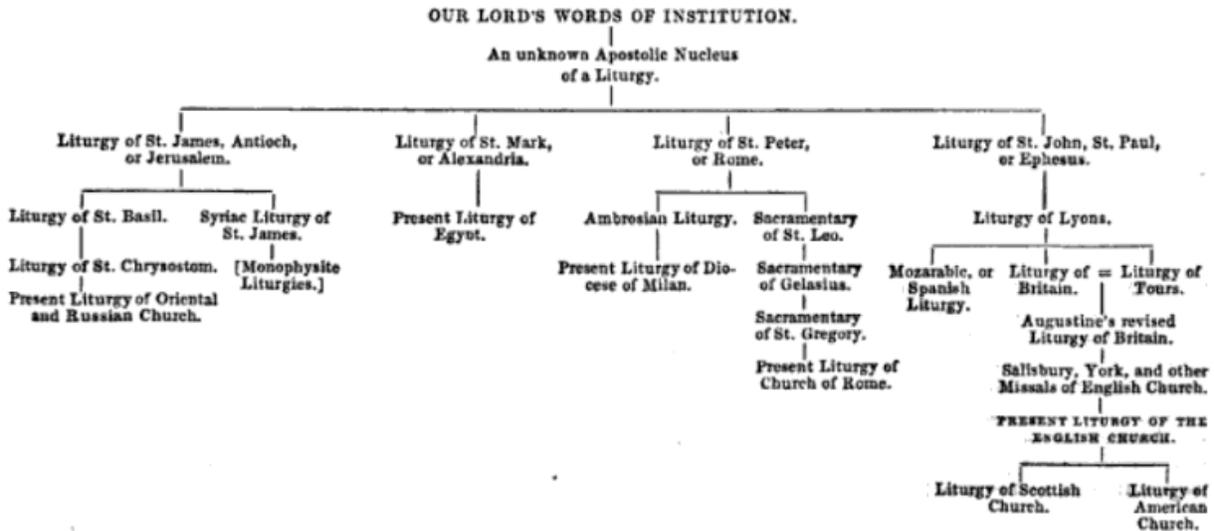
LITURGY OF THE UPPER ROOM

Deacon's litany for the faithful, with ditychs (lists of names of living and dead)
Kiss of peace
Offertory: Collection of alms
Presentation of elements
Preparation of elements and admixture of water to wine
Sursum corda [Lift up your hearts]
Consecration Prayer:
Preface: Thanksgiving and adoration for creation, holiness of God, etc.
Sanctus [Holy, Holy, Holy]
Words of Institution
Anamnesis [remembrance]
Epiclesis [invocation of the Holy Spirit]
Great Intercession for living and dead
Lord's Prayer
Fraction [breaking of bread]
Elevation – 'Holy things to the holy'—and Delivery
Communion of all in both kinds, each communicant replying 'Amen'; during
reception Psalms xliii and xxxiv were sung by cantors
Post-communion Thanksgiving
Deacon's litany and celebrants brief Intercession
Reservation of bread only, for sick and absent
Dismissal

F. How the Liturgy Came to Us

The following charts are from John Henry Blunt, *The Annotated Book of Common Prayer, Being an Historical, Ritual, and Theological Commentary on the Devotional System of the Church of England*, 1867.

§ Table showing the origin of the principal Liturgies used throughout the Church.



§ Table showing the order in which the principal features of the Primitive Liturgies occur.

<i>St. James.</i>	<i>St. Mark.</i>	<i>St. Peter.</i>	<i>St. John.</i>
1. Kiss of Peace.	1. Kiss of Peace.	2. Lift up your hearts.	7. Prayer for the living.
2. Lift up your hearts.	2. Lift up your hearts.	3. Tersanctus.	8. Prayer for the departed.
3. Tersanctus.	7. Prayer for the living.	7. Prayer for the living.	1. Kiss of Peace.
4. Commemoration of Institution.	8. Prayer for the departed.	6. Prayer for descent of the Holy Ghost.	2. Lift up your hearts.
5. The Oblation.	3. Tersanctus.	4. Commemoration of Institution.	3. Tersanctus.
6. Prayer for descent of the Holy Ghost.	4. Commemoration of Institution.	5. The Oblation.	4. Commemoration of Institution.
7. Prayer for the living.	5. The Oblation.	8. Prayer for the departed.	5. The Oblation.
8. Prayer for the departed.	6. Prayer for descent of the Holy Ghost.	10. Union of the Consecrated Elements.	6. Prayer for descent of the Holy Ghost.
9. The Lord's Prayer.	10. Union of the Consecrated Elements.	9. The Lord's Prayer.	10. Union of the Consecrated Elements.
10. Union of the Consecrated Elements.	9. The Lord's Prayer.	1. Kiss of Peace.	9. The Lord's Prayer.
11. Communion.	11. Communion.	11. Communion.	11. Communion.
12. Thanksgiving.	12. Thanksgiving.	12. Thanksgiving.	12. Thanksgiving.

Appendix: The Anaphora [or Eucharistic Prayer] of Hippolytus (c. 215 A.D.)

Sursum Corda

The Bishop begins:

The Lord be with you.

And all reply:

And with thy spirit.

The Bishop continues:

Lift up your hearts.

Congregation:

We lift them up unto the Lord.^[8]

Bishop:

Let us give thanks to the Lord.

Congregation:

It is right and just.

Thanksgiving

The Bishop continues:

We give thanks to you God,
through your beloved son Jesus Christ,
whom you sent to us in former times
as Savior, Redeemer, and Messenger of your Will,
who is your inseparable Word,
through whom you made all,
and in whom you were well-pleased,
whom you sent from heaven into the womb of a virgin,
who, being conceived within her, was made flesh,
and appeared as your Son,
born of the Holy Spirit and the virgin.
It is he who, fulfilling your will
and acquiring for you a holy people,
extended his hands in suffering,
in order to liberate from sufferings
those who believe in you.

Words of Institution

Who, when he was delivered to voluntary suffering,
in order to dissolve death,
and break the chains of the devil,
and tread down hell,
and bring the just to the light,
and set the limit,
and manifest the resurrection,
taking the bread, and giving thanks to you, said,
"Take, eat, for this is my body which is broken for you."
Likewise the chalice, saying,
This is my blood which is shed for you.
Whenever you do this, do this [in] memory of me.

Anamnesis and Oblation

Therefore, remembering his death and resurrection,
we offer to you the bread and the chalice,
giving thanks to you, who has made us worthy
to stand before you and to serve as your priests.

Epiclesis

And we pray that you would send your Holy Spirit
to the oblation of your Holy Church.
In their gathering together,
give to all those who partake of your holy mysteries the fullness of the Holy Spirit,
toward the strengthening of the faith in truth,

Doxology

that we may praise you and glorify you,
through your son Jesus Christ,
through whom to you be glory and honor,
Father and Son,
with the Holy Spirit,
in your Holy Church,
now and always, Amen.