

Celebrate with Reverence: Eucharistic Living

- STEVEN L. THOMASON
- MARCH 6, 2024

Overview of this evening

- ▶ Mercy as the medium of connection
- ▶ The meal and the gift
- ▶ Eucharistic theology
- ▶ Narrated Eucharist
- ▶ Conversations

It begins with Mercy (Shakespeare)

The quality of mercy is not strained.
It droppeth as gentle as the rain from
heaven...It is twice blest:
It blesseth him that gives and him that takes.
Tis mightiest in the mightiest; it becomes the
throned monarch better than his crown.
His scepter shows the force of temporal power;
The attribute of awe and majesty, wherein doth
sit the dread and fear of kings.

But mercy is above the sceptered sway;
It is enthroned in the hearts of kings;
It is an attribute of God himself;
And earthly power doth then show like God's
When mercy seasons justice.

God of mercy



- ▶ Mercy: hesed (lovingkindness)—same Hebrew root for “womb”
- ▶ Mercy is womblike in its gentle care for the other, orients to the other
- ▶ The need for mercy assumes some infraction and a presumptive corrective justice (punishment)—but God seems to set those aside again and again
- ▶ Mercy and forgiveness go together
 - ▶ Forgiveness lets go of the past
 - ▶ Mercy makes possible a better future by not seeking strict justice
- ▶ Mercy has a superabundant quality (largess, magnanimity, unexpected)
- ▶ Becomes a blessing to the one who receives and the one who practices

The Meal and the Gift



Two ancient human ways of creating, maintaining, or restoring good relations with one another



They represent an external manifestation of an internal disposition toward the other (sacramental?)



Delicate protocols direct what, when, why, to whom and by whom



In the Eucharist, we get both as part of the sacrificial ritual act that serves to create, maintain, or restore good relations with the divine

Triad conversation

Share a brief story (1-2 min each) about a special meal or a gift you received.

Who, what, when, where

Why meaningful? How did it change your life?

How did it deepen your relationship with the other?

Eucharist—some basics

- ▶ Greek: thanksgiving
- ▶ Aka the Lord's Supper, Holy Communion, the Divine Liturgy, the Mass, and the Great Offertory
- ▶ Jesus instituted the eucharist “on the night when he was betrayed.”
- ▶ The Last Supper provides the basis for the fourfold eucharistic action: taking, blessing, breaking, and giving.
- ▶ Christ's body and blood are really present in the sacrament of the eucharist and received by faith.
- ▶ Christ's presence is also known in the gathered eucharistic community.



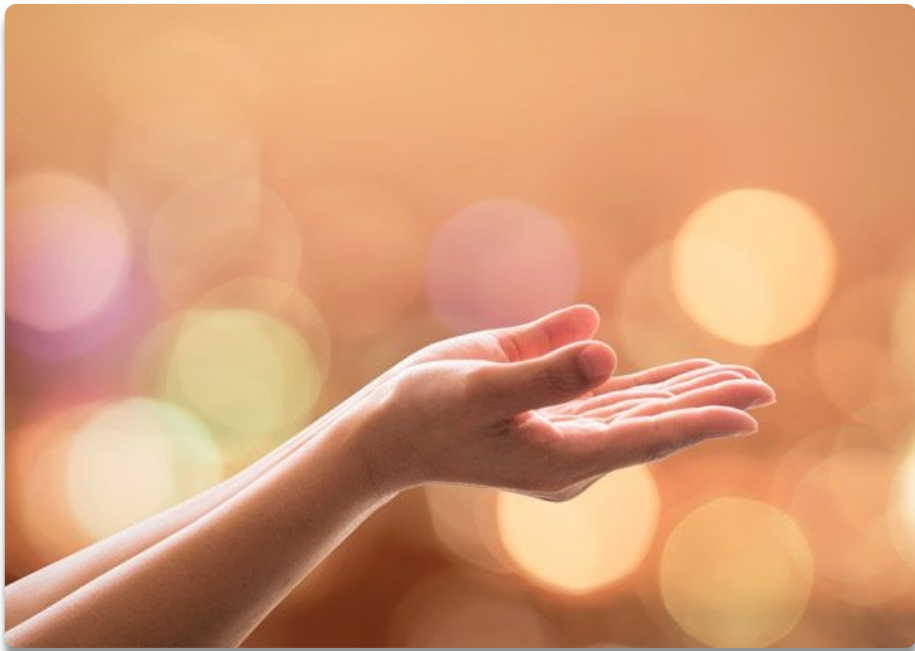
Sacrifice—what it is, what it is not

- ▶ Sacrum facere: to make sacred
- ▶ Frederick Buechner: "To sacrifice something is to make it holy by giving it away for love."
- ▶ The meal is offered to God then returned to the offerers as food for the feast with God
- ▶ The gift is a sacred offering (offertory) then returned to the offerers as sacred meal

- ▶ Not about appeasing God or substitutionary atonement or suffering



How do we do this?



- ▶ Offer to God a sacrifice of thanksgiving, and make good your vows to the Most High. (Ps. 50:14)
- ▶ Ascribe to the Lord the honor due his Name; bring offerings and come into his courts. (Ps. 96:8)
- ▶ Walk in love, as Christ loves us and gave himself for us, an offering and a sacrifice to God. (Eph. 5:2)
- ▶ I appeal to you, brethren, by the mercies of God, to present yourselves as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship. (Rom 12:1)
- ▶ Give and give and give again what God hath given thee...

Ancient Israel Tradition



- ▶ Often misunderstood as animal sacrifice to appease an angry God (really about a turn to faithfulness)
 - ▶ Blood sacrifices—burnt offerings, guilt offerings, peace and thank offerings
 - ▶ Grain and wine offerings (agrarian)
- ▶ Sacrifices really just about projecting meaning onto practice
 - ▶ Ritual lends meaning.
 - ▶ Not about the death, but the mimesis of what gives life (right relationship).
 - ▶ About feasting with God in a way that we come to understand life as it was designed by God to be...



The Cross of Christ as Locus of Sacrifice

Christology & Soteriology

- ▶ Most of our doctrinal statements in our tradition focus on Christology (the person of Christ)
- ▶ Fewer deal with Soteriology (the saving work of Christ)
 - ▶ These are nuanced in our eucharistic prayers
 - ▶ We hold them together and in tension
 - ▶ Several themes of soteriology (salvation)
 - ▶ *Christ as sacrifice (paschal victim)*
 - ▶ *Christ as victor (ransom for sinners)*
 - ▶ *The source of forgiveness (JC' righteousness is redemptive for us)*
 - ▶ *Christ as moral example (JC opens path to God's love)*

Real Presence

- ▶ The 1991 statement of the Anglican-Roman Catholic International Commission notes, “The elements are not mere signs; Christ's body and blood become really present and are really given. But they are really present and given in order that, receiving them, believers may be united in communion with Christ the Lord.”
- ▶ “by your Holy Spirit to be for your people the Body and Blood of your Son, the holy food and drink of new and unending life in him” (BCP, p. 363)
- ▶ John Donne:
He was the Word that spake it,
he took the bread and brake it,
and what that Word did make it,
I do believe and take it.
- ▶ Lancelot Andrewes and the Via Media

Outline of the Eucharistic Prayer

1. Sursum corda (lift up your hearts)
2. Proper/Common Preface (addresses the prayer to God)
3. Sanctus (eternal hymn) (& Benedictus)
4. Recitation of Salvation History (God acts across human history)
5. Narrative of Institution (Jesus invites to eat, drink and remember)
6. Memorial Acclamation (Anamnesis)
7. Oblation (offering of elements and ourselves)
8. Epiclesis (invocation of the Holy Spirit)
9. Doxology (close in trinitarian praise)
10. Great Amen (the people lend their voice of assent to the prayer)

Take, Bless, Break and Give

- ▶ **He took bread, said the blessing, broke it, and gave it to them, and said, “Take it; this is my body.”**
– Mark 14:22



Supper at Emmaus

Selected Bibliography

- ▶ 1979 Book of Common Prayer.
- ▶ Marcus Borg and John Dominic Crossan, *The Last Week: What the Gospels Really Teach about Jesus' Last Days in Jerusalem*, 2006.
- ▶ www.episcopalchurch.org/glossary
- ▶ Howard Galley. *Ceremonies of the Eucharist: A Guide to Celebration*. 1989
- ▶ Furman Buchanan. *Gifts of God for the People of God: Exploring Worship in the Episcopal Church*, 2019

Examen: The Four-fold Pattern
