

CHAPTER FOUR: THE CHURCH AND ITS SYMBOLISM

The Church Building and Sacramental Worship

THE church is the body of Christ. It is people, not a building. This is one of the significant developments from the Old Testament to the New Testament. In the Old Testament, God dwelt in the temple. In the New Testament, the Incarnation fulfills the temple. The glory of God dwells in the person of Jesus Christ. On Pentecost, the Holy Spirit came to dwell within God's people. Thus, we are now the temple of God (1 Corinthians 3:16).

However, to say that God dwells in his people is not to say that all there is of God is contained within the church. The earthly temple in Jerusalem did not fully contain God either (1 Kings 8:27). There is still a sense in which God's people, in whom his Spirit dwells, enter into his presence in a fuller way through worship. This can be seen in Revelation 4 and 5. St. John, "in the Spirit," is called up into heaven, where he sees, among other things, God's throne, the cherubim and the "lamb as though it had been slain."

In the Old Testament, only the anointed priests were able to enter into the presence of God and offer sacrifice. In the New Testament, the whole church is anointed and is able to exercise a priestly ministry (1 Peter 2:5, Rev. 1:6). The gift of the Spirit is just the beginning of our ascent to God. The Spirit makes it possible for us to offer sacrificial worship, but worship is still a movement from earth to heaven.

The Son of God became man to reveal God more clearly and unite us with him through the gift of the Spirit. After the resurrection, the Son of God ascended back into heaven. Since we are united with him through the Spirit, we ascend with him. In one sense, Christ lives with us on earth, but, in another sense, we live with Christ in heaven. Worship highlights our ascent to the Father through the Son. When our redemption is complete, we will live in God's presence (Revelation 21:3). There will be no more need for worship to bridge the gap between earth and heaven, between time and eternity. But we are not there yet.

Thus, from the beginning, the church worshiped in places that were arranged and furnished in such a way as to call to mind the presence of God in the heavenly temple. Even when the early church met in the homes of its members, it still furnished those rooms with an altar, candles, censers and such things that enabled the space to be sacramental, to point to the reality of heaven. The worship of the church can be offered "in every place" (Malachi 1:11). However, it is best when the place of worship is arranged to mirror the reality of heaven.

The symbolic world of the church is important because sacramental worship involves our whole person. Worship is not merely a mental act of thinking about God or grasping propositional truths. Worship is an experience of union with God that involves the ascent of our whole being, mind, body and spirit, into his presence. This is why the fullness of worship engages all of the senses.

The symbolism of the church engages the eyes. Incense engages the sense of smell. The Word of God and music engage the sense of hearing. We will hold a book and hymnal and we will actually touch the Sacrament. We will taste the Body and Blood of Christ. Our resurrection hope is not freedom from the body. It is freedom in the body. Thus, the worship that is a foretaste of resurrection involves our bodies as well. It is not merely a “spiritual” or mental act.

The Church as an Image of Heaven

The form of the church follows the Old Testament idea of the temple. God told Moses to build the tabernacle (and, later, the temple) in a very specific way (Exodus 25:40, Hebrews 8:5) because the temple on earth was built to be a mirror image, a copy of the true temple in heaven (Hebrews 9:24). The worshiper, entering the earthly temple, learned the truth about God in heaven.

The sacrificial system of the Old Testament taught the Jewish people that sacrifice was necessary to atone for sins and reestablish fellowship with God. One could not approach God in any way one chose. One had to approach God through the system of sacrifices and offerings he had commanded. Historically, Christian churches have been built, like the temple, to reflect the reality of heaven. Christian worship is temple worship carried on in the light of the fulfillment of all sacrifice by Jesus on the cross. As Hebrews says, we have “boldness to enter into the holiest by the blood of Jesus, By a new and living way, which he hath consecrated for us” (Hebrews 10:19).

The symbolic world of the church helps the worshiper to enter into the reality of heaven. The worship of the church is modeled on the worship described in Revelation 4 and 5. We “lift up our hearts” to join in the eternal Sanctus, the “Holy, Holy, Holy” of angels, archangels and all the company of heaven (Rev. 4:8, Isaiah 6:3). The centerpiece of worship is “The Lamb as though it had been slain” (Rev. 5:5) whose sacrifice we recall and present before God on the altar. In the liturgy, we come to the Father through the sacrifice of the Son (John 10:1, 14:6).

Authentic Worship and the Eucharist

The life and death of Jesus Christ are the perfect acts of worship. Jesus offered himself to God through his sinless life and his sacrificial death. We participate in his perfect offering because we have become members of his body in baptism. As we follow Christ in faith and obedience, our lives become an offering to God.

The church’s central act of worship is what the New Testament refers to as the Lord’s Supper. The early church referred to the Lord’s Supper as the “Eucharist,” a Greek word that means “thanksgiving.” The Eucharist is our most objective way of proclaiming and participating in Christ’s authentic act of worship. In the Eucharist, the church remembers and presents before God the perfect sacrifice of Christ, and the members of Christ’s body offer themselves to God in Christ and through Christ.

There are a couple of ways that this is shown in the liturgy. First, we offer bread and wine to God. These represent the creation (wheat and grapes) modified by human labor (turning wheat into bread

and grapes into wine). Our offering is made acceptable by the act of consecration, as it is united with and sanctified by Christ's offering. Our offering becomes the Body and Blood of Christ just as we become the Body of Christ by the gift of the Spirit.

Second, after we remember and present before God the sacrifice of Christ, we "offer ourselves, our souls and our bodies to be a reasonable, holy and living sacrifice" (Romans 12:1). In our natural state of sin, we are not able to offer ourselves to God. Our inadequate offering of self is made acceptable because it is united with Christ's perfect offering. As St. Augustine wrote in his book, *The City of God*,

The whole redeemed city, that is to say, the congregation or community of the saints, is offered to God as our sacrifice through the great High Priest, who offered Himself to God in His passion for us, that we might be members of this glorious head, according to the form of a servant...this also is the sacrifice which the Church continually celebrates in the sacrament of the altar, known to the faithful, in which she teaches that she herself is offered in the offering she makes to God.

Eucharist as New Creation

Man was made to take the creation God had given him and offer it back to God in thanksgiving. Man was made to worship God "Eucharistically," or with thanksgiving. Through sin, man took the creation God gave and said, "This is mine!" The result is all of the disorder and chaos of the fallen world we live in. In Christ we are restored to communion and fellowship with God and to our original vocation. The Eucharist reflects the restoration of right order to the creation. We take the creation God has given us and offer it back to God in thanksgiving through the symbols of bread and wine. We participate in God's new creation that has begun "in Christ" (cf. Revelation 21:5).

Eucharist as Remembrance

The Eucharist is the church's central act of sacrificial worship. The idea of the Eucharistic sacrifice is not that Jesus is offered again in a manner that somehow adds to the one sacrifice of Calvary. Rather the idea of Eucharistic sacrifice is that the past event of Calvary is brought into the present so that we can experience its benefits now. This follows the Jewish understanding of Passover. The rabbis taught that each generation of Jewish people participated in the past event of the Exodus from Egypt through the Passover celebration, which commemorated the original event. It was, the rabbis taught, as if each Passover participant set his feet on the bottom of the Red Sea. This is how each subsequent generation of Jewish people were united with the Exodus generation in a common experience of salvation. This is what is meant when Jesus said, "Do this in remembrance of me." The past event of the cross is experienced in the present moment. The whole church is united in a common experience of salvation.

The Eucharist also looks forward to the future banquet of heaven (cf. Revelation 19:9). As we receive the sacrament, we are united with God in Christ in a manner that looks forward to that more perfect union that we will enjoy in the Resurrection (cf. 1 Corinthians 13:12). Thus, in the Eucharist the past

and future are experienced in the present. We receive the benefits of Christ's past sacrifice and we receive a foretaste of future glory. The Eucharist thus captures the balance between fulfillment and expectation that is at the heart of the life of faith.

The Road to Emmaus: Luke 24:13-35 - A Pattern for the Eucharist

St. Luke's account of the appearance of the Risen Christ to the two men on the road to Emmaus reveals the pattern for worship in the church. We will read it first, then reflect on what it reveals to us.

NOW behold, two of them were traveling that same day to a village called Emmaus, which was seven miles from Jerusalem. And they talked together of all these things which had happened. So it was, while they conversed and reasoned, that Jesus Himself drew near and went with them. But their eyes were restrained, so that they did not know Him. And He said to them, "What kind of conversation is this that you have with one another as you walk and are sad?" Then the one whose name was Cleopas answered and said to Him, "Are you the only stranger in Jerusalem, and have you not known the things which happened there in these days?" And He said to them, "What things?" So they said to Him, "The things concerning Jesus of Nazareth, who was a Prophet mighty in deed and word before God and all the people, and how the chief priests and our rulers delivered Him to be condemned to death, and crucified Him. But we were hoping that it was He who was going to redeem Israel. Indeed, besides all this, today is the third day since these things happened. Yes, and certain women of our company, who arrived at the tomb early, astonished us. When they did not find His body, they came saying that they had also seen a vision of angels who said He was alive. And certain of those who were with us went to the tomb and found it just as the women had said; but Him they did not see." Then He said to them, "O foolish ones, and slow of heart to believe in all that the prophets have spoken! Ought not the Christ to have suffered these things and to enter into His glory?" And beginning at Moses and all the Prophets, He expounded to them in all the Scriptures the things concerning Himself. Then they drew near to the village where they were going, and He indicated that He would have gone farther. But they constrained Him, saying, "Abide with us, for it is toward evening, and the day is far spent." And He went in to stay with them. Now it came to pass, as He sat at the table with them, that He took bread, blessed and broke it, and gave it to them. Then their eyes were opened and they knew Him; and He vanished from their sight. And they said to one another, "Did not our heart burn within us while He talked with us on the road, and while He opened the Scriptures to us?" So they rose up that very hour and returned to Jerusalem, and found the eleven and those who were with them gathered together, saying, "The Lord is risen indeed, and has appeared to Simon!" And they told about the things that had happened on the road, and how He was known to them in the breaking of bread (NKJV).

Word and Sacrament

The Road to Emmaus story reveals the basic pattern for the liturgy: Word and Sacrament. Jesus explained the Scriptures to the two men. Then, after his instruction on the road was completed, he took

bread, blessed it, broke it and gave it to them in a manner that clearly recalls the Last Supper. St. Luke tells us, “Their eyes were opened and they knew him.” St. Luke wrote this story to a church that had already been gathering to celebrate the Lord’s Supper each week for some time (cf. Acts 20:7). This story reflects the early church’s understanding of worship. From the beginning, the liturgy of the Lord’s Supper included two main parts. The reading of Scripture followed by an explanation on the part of the bishop or priest. This was followed by communion: The taking, blessing, breaking and giving of bread.

The risen Christ is revealed to the church throughout history in the same manner as he was revealed to these first disciples. The road to Emmaus is a pattern for his revelation for all subsequent generations of Christians. As the church gathers for her central act of worship, the Scriptures are read and explained. Then, the church takes, blesses, breaks and gives bread. Our eyes are opened. We know Jesus in the breaking of the bread.

It is a sequence of Word, then Sacrament. We come to know Jesus through the Bible so that we can experience communion with him in the Sacrament. This is reflected in the setup of the church. The pulpit and the lectern can be seen as the gateway to the altar. The Bible, read and preached, leads us to the altar where we experience communion.

A bishop once said, “If we do not know the Jesus of the Bible we meet a stranger in the Eucharist.” This is why daily Bible reading and prayer is so important. When we know and believe what the Bible says about Jesus, and when we know and respond to what the Bible requires of us, we are lead to genuine communion with God at the altar.

A Tour of the Church

What follows is a glossary that identifies and defines the various items of furniture in the church. This lists begins at the back of the church and moves towards the front. Many of these items are common to all sacramental churches. All will have an altar, a central image of the cross, a sanctuary and a nave. However, each church will have its own arrangement of statues, stained glass windows and pictures of Jesus and the saints.

Baptismal Font. Traditionally by the entrance because we enter the church through baptism (1 Cor. 12:13). When we pass by the font, we should remember our baptismal vows.

Holy Water. Holy water is water that has been blessed with prayers asking that the water be a defense against evil. Typically, one will dip one’s finger in the holy water and make the sign of the cross. This acts as both a reminder of baptism as we enter the church, and a prayer for God’s grace and protection as we leave the church.

Nave. The nave is the body of the church where the people sit. From the Latin *navis*, meaning ship.

Sanctuary. The area around the altar, which represents the Holy of Holies in heaven (cf. Heb. 9:3). It is separated from the nave by the communion rail.

Altar. The place where sacrifice is offered. There were various Old Testament altars where the patriarchs of Israel offered sacrifice before the tabernacle and temple were built. The tabernacle and Solomon's temple both had two altars: An altar of burnt offering, and an altar of incense. In the Christian tradition, the altar is the place where Christ's sacrifice is remembered and represented before God in the liturgy (cf. Hebrews 13:10, Malachi 1:11).

Tabernacle. A safe-like structure atop the altar that contains the Reserved Sacrament—the body and (less frequently) the blood of Jesus that have been consecrated at a previous celebration of Holy Communion. The sacrament is reserved so that it can be taken to the sick and also to foster contemplative prayer in the church.

Sanctuary Lamp. A candle that burns continually to indicate the presence of the reserved sacrament in the tabernacle.

Credence Table. A table on which the elements are placed in preparation for Holy Communion. Also contains water and a bowl for washing the priest's hands before the consecration.

Lectern. A desk on which the Bible sits, from which are read the lessons at Morning and Evening Prayer and, sometimes, the epistle at Holy Communion.

Pulpit. The desk from which the sermon is usually preached.

Crucifix. A cross with an image of the body of Jesus on it. This helps us to call to mind the death of Jesus (cf. 1 Corinthians 11:26).

Candles. Symbols of the presence of the Holy Spirit (cf. Rev. 1:12). The six candles on the re-table (back shelf of the altar) are called "office lights." These are lit for Morning and Evening Prayer ("the daily offices") and for choral celebrations of Holy Communion. The two candles on the altar are Eucharistic candles and are lit for every celebration of Holy Communion.

Statues and Pictures. At the seventh ecumenical council, Nicea II, 787, the church formally approved the use of pictures and images in worship as an extension of the principle of the incarnation. God himself took on form; therefore, it is okay to use art as an aid in worship.

St. Matthew's Church has four focal pieces of art in the sanctuary:

The stained glass window of Jesus enthroned in heaven complements the image of Jesus on the cross. His death is shown along with his victory over death and his position as Lord and King. It is based on the image of Jesus in Revelation 5. He has in his hand the scroll with seven seals. He is surrounded by the cherubim (cf. Ezekiel 1:4-10, 10:3) which indicates that Jesus is God because God dwells between the cherubim.

The statue of the Blessed Virgin with Child reminds us of the genuine humanity of Jesus and the faith of Mary—“Be it unto me according to the word” (Luke 1:38). Her faith stands in contrast with the disobedience of Eve and is a model for all Christians in their acceptance of Jesus Christ.

The statue of our Patron St. Matthew calls to mind his conversion. He left his lucrative tax collecting career, symbolized by the coins on the ground, to follow Jesus, symbolized by the pen and book—he is writing the gospel.

Moving from left to right, these summarize the Creed: The Blessed Virgin with Child portrays the conception and birth of Christ. The Crucifix portrays his suffering and death. Jesus on his throne in heaven portrays the resurrection and ascension to the right hand of God. St. Matthew portrays the Holy Ghost and the Communion of the Saints because he represents the church, which is created by the gift of the Spirit.

A Glossary of Vestments

Cassock. A black garment worn under the other garments. A red cassock is sometimes worn by servers.

Surplus. A white garment worn over the cassock.

Cassock and surplus are the normal vestments for Morning and Evening Prayer and for servers at Holy Communion.

Alb. A white garment worn under the chasuble and other Eucharistic vestments.

Cincture. Rope worn around the waist over the alb.

Maniple. Cloth vestment that hangs over the priest's arm like a waiter's towel. It reminds him that he is called to serve.

Stole. A long thin vestment worn around the neck. It is worn over the front by a priest and over the side by a deacon. It represents the yoke of Christ.

Chasuble. The celebrant's overgarment for the Eucharist. It represents the seamless garment of Christ.

The alb, cincture, maniple, stole and chasuble are the standard vestments worn by the priest when he is celebrating the Holy Communion.

Dalmatic.* Overgarment worn, on occasion, by a Deacon at a High Mass.

Tunicle.* Overgarment worn, on occasion, by a Subdeacon at High Mass.

**These are not normally used at St. Matthew's Church.*

Chalice. The cup from which the Blood of Christ is administered.

Purificator. Linen cloth used to wipe the chalice.

Paten. The dish from which the body of Christ is administered.

Pall. A firm, square piece used to cover the chalice.

Veil. The cloth, of seasonal color, that is draped over the chalice.

Burse. An cloth folder that sits on top of the veiled chalice.

Corporal. Square linen cloth upon which the bread and wine are consecrated.

These items are stacked together before and after the celebration of Holy Communion. The purificator is draped over the chalice. The paten sits over the chalice on top of the purificator. The pall sits on top of the paten and is covered by the veil. The burse sits on top. It contains the corporal and an extra purificator in case of a spill.

Lavabo Bowl. Bowl for washing the priest's hands before communion.

Lavabo Towel. Linen towel used for drying the priest's hands.

Bread Box. Box that holds the bread before it is consecrated.

Cruets. Vessels that contain wine and water.

These items sit on the credence table during a celebration of Holy Communion.

An Overview of the Liturgy: Three Parts

What follows is an outline of the main parts of the liturgy. Having a sense of how the liturgy progresses helps us to meaningfully participate in each part. Each worshiper should become familiar with purpose and meaning of each part. These will be covered in greater detail in the next chapter.

1. The Rite of Entry. Preparing for Worship

Opening hymn
Collect for Purity and Introit
Summary of the Law (or Decalogue)
Kyrie and Gloria in excelsis (*if the Gloria is said or sung here*)

2. The Liturgy of the Word

Collect, Epistle and Gospel
Creed and Sermon

3. The Liturgy of the Eucharist

Offertory - “He took” - Bread and wine are offered on the altar.

Prayer for the Church
Confession, Absolution and Comfortable Words

Consecration - “He blessed” - The bread and wine are consecrated by prayer.

“Lift up your hearts” through the Prayer of Consecration
The Prayer of Consecration includes a recalling of the Last Supper; an *Oblation* or prayer by which the memorial sacrifice is offered to God; and an *Invocation* or a calling down of the Holy Spirit upon the elements.
The Lord’s Prayer is the culmination of the consecration. We come to God through the sacrifice of Christ and, thus, have the privilege of calling God “Father.”

Fraction or the Breaking of the Bread - “He broke”- The consecrated bread is broken.

As the Body of Christ is broken, the following is said:
Priest: “The peace of the Lord be always with you.”
People: “And with thy spirit.”
Prayer of Humble Access
Agnus Dei (O Lamb of God...)

Communion - “He gave” - The Sacrament is given to the people.

Reception of the Sacrament
Post communion Hymn - Optional
Prayer of Thanksgiving
Gloria in excelsis (*If Gloria is said or sung here*)
The Blessing

Questions for Review

1. If the people are the body of Christ and the temple of the Holy Spirit, why do we still worship in church buildings that have symbolic meaning?
2. Where does the pattern or model for the structure and symbolism of church buildings come from?
3. How does Eucharistic worship reflect the restoration of man's original vocation?
4. How does the appearance of the Risen Christ to the two men on the road to Emmaus establish a pattern for the church's worship?
5. What are the distinct parts of the liturgy? How does the liturgy mirror what Jesus did at the Last Supper?