

WHY DO WE DO WHAT WE DO IN CHURCH?

*Customs of Grace Church in Newark
An Anglican Catholic Parish
of The Episcopal Church*

by Father J. Brent Bates, Rector



GRACE CHURCH IN NEWARK

AN EPISCOPAL PARISH

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WHAT IS THE PURPOSE OF THIS BOOKLET?

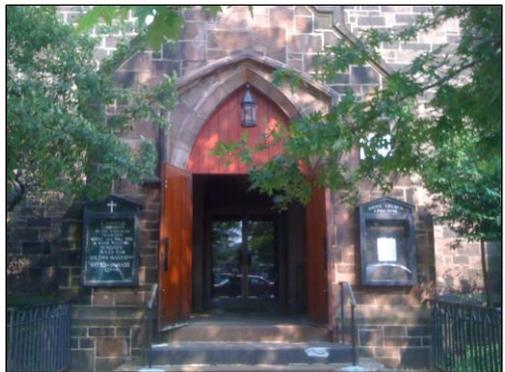
This booklet is provided for anyone who would like to know more about why we do what we do in Church. It briefly explains our customs of prayer. Follow along during the service or take the booklet home to reflect on your experience. While there is no attempt to make everyone's personal devotional practices conform completely, we do pride ourselves on sharing a way of prayer in common.

WHAT KIND OF CHURCH IS THIS?



Grace Church in Newark is an Anglican Catholic parish of The Episcopal Church founded in 1837. While we hold to ancient Catholic beliefs and practices, we are “Anglican” rather than “Roman.” We are part of The Episcopal Church, a member of The Anglican Communion, which is derived from English Catholicism.

At Grace Church in Newark our liturgy reflects ancient Catholic practices, as well as the influence of the nineteenth-century Catholic revival in Anglicanism and the twentieth-century Liturgical Movement. Our words of prayer derive almost entirely from sacred scripture, and our ancient way of praying engages our eyes, ears, nose, mouths, and entire body. We practice all seven sacraments: one initiates (baptism), four sustain us in faith (Eucharist, confirmation, penance, and anointing), and two are reserved for those with special callings (marriage and holy orders). A sacrament is an outward and visible sign of God's grace at work within us.



WHAT IS “MASS,” HOLY COMMUNION, OR THE EUCHARIST?

The service (or “liturgy,” which refers to the prayerful “work” of the people) in which you are now participating was instituted by Christ the night before he was crucified, was refined by the apostles and early Church Fathers, and has evolved slowly over the centuries. It is the most important expression of our devotion to God and the primary Sunday service of the Christian Church. The service is variously called “Mass” (derived from the words of dismissal of the ancient Latin Mass), Holy Communion, or the Eucharist (derived from Greek, which means “to give thanks”). At Mass, we bring all of ourselves as a sacrifice to God, and experience the Real Presence of Christ and his sacrifice in the Blessed Sacrament.

WHAT DO I DO WHEN I ENTER THE CHURCH?



Why is there a bowl of water at the entrance of the church?

You will find a holy water stoop, a symbol of baptism, as you enter the front doors of the church and come through the vestibule into the narthex. You are invited to dip your fingers into the holy water and make the sign of the cross (touch your forehead, your chest, your left shoulder, then your right shoulder). Baptism initiates union with Christ and the Church and the holy water reminds one of baptism upon entering the holy space.

Why is it so quiet in the Church?

Most parishioners arrive early to prepare their hearts and minds in silent prayer. We don't engage in small talk before the service because we have entered the presence of God and the fellowship of the saints. Parishioners wait for the exchange of the peace or Coffee Hour to enjoy one another less formally. You will also notice there are moments of silence interspersed at different times throughout the service for reflection. There is no need to be rushed in the presence of God.



How do I prepare for Mass?

Prayers in preparation for mass may take various forms. Some kneel or sit in their pew or perhaps light a votive candle for a specific intention at the Blessed Sacrament Altar. Prayer might be talking with God or merely being in the presence of God. But prayer in our tradition is also multisensory. One need not sit with eyes tightly shut thinking of what to say to God next. Notice the beautiful stained glass, the artifacts of worship, the Statues of Jesus and the Blessed Virgin Mary, the soft flickering glow of candles, and the colors of the hangings, which indicate the particular church season (white in Christmas and Easter, blue in Advent leading to Christmas, purple in Lent leading to Easter, and green at most other times). Notice the smell of flowers and incense. Listen to the silence, the rhythmic chants, and even the sounds of the street. Taste the bread and wine. Touch the wood and the stones that are imbedded with generations of prayer, feel the shake of a hand or a kiss on the cheek. This is all a part of our prayer experience.

Why are people bowing?

You may notice people bowing and genuflecting (kneeling briefly on one's right knee), particularly when they enter or leave their pews. We genuflect to acknowledge Christ's presence at the altar. One generally bows toward the altar, unless the consecrated sacrament is present, at which time it is customary to genuflect (if able). Some will also bow their heads at the name of Jesus, the invocation of the Trinity, and even the name of the Blessed Virgin Mary. We believe our prayer is also enacted in our whole bodies, even though some of the actions may seem awkward at first. It is not important that we all do each of these. Prayerfully do those actions with which you are comfortable.

Finally, a few minutes before the beginning of the service, you will have a chance to enjoy a beautiful organ prelude and another few moments of silence before the service begins.

WHY ALL THE LATIN, INCENSE, AND UNUSUAL CLOTHING?



Why do you use Latin?

The liturgy begins with a Latin chant called the Introit, which changes each week and is specific to the theme of the day. You can read the translation of the text (often a Psalm verse) in

your service leaflet and notice how the theme ties in with the other prayers and readings for the day. We use Latin because the original chants were written in this ancient and beautiful language of the church. It also imparts a sense of mystery and reverence at the start of the service.

Who are the people in the procession and what are they doing?

All of the ministers enter the church, having come immediately from preparatory prayers in the All Saints' Chapel. The entrance procession begins with the thurifer, who carries a thurible (or censer) containing burning coals and incense. Incense is an ancient aid of worship signifying holiness and symbolizing our prayers rising to God. It engages our sense of smell, one of our most important memory-triggering senses, telling our bodies that we are in a holy place. Next in the procession is the crucifer who carries one of the most significant symbols of our faith in a crucified and resurrected savior, followed by the candlebearers who illuminate the cross and symbolize the light of Christ entering the world, followed by the other ministers of the liturgy including Eucharistic Ministers, Lectors, the Master of Ceremonies, any assisting priests or deacons, and finally the celebrant.

Why are these ministers wearing unusual clothing?

Notice the clothes, called vestments, of the ministers. All ministers (including the priest) are wearing a white alb, which symbolizes our baptismal garments. Priests wear stoles to indicate their sacred ministry. A celebrating priest will also be wearing a chasuble (the large colored piece of fabric that is most visible, and corresponds with the seasonal colors). This is an ancient Roman garment that has come to be associated primarily with the Mass.

What is the priest doing with water and at the altar?

On Sundays the celebrant moves to the baptismal font to sprinkle the people with holy water in remembrance of our baptisms as the ministers take their seats. The celebrant, then, salutes the altar with a kiss and censes the altar with the thurible. The altar is the most holy place in the church because Christ becomes present in the bread and the wine there. Any of these signs of reverence, including when people bow toward the altar, are a display of reverence for Christ.

The entrance is concluded when the celebrant moves to his chair for the first half of the service, the Liturgy of the Word.

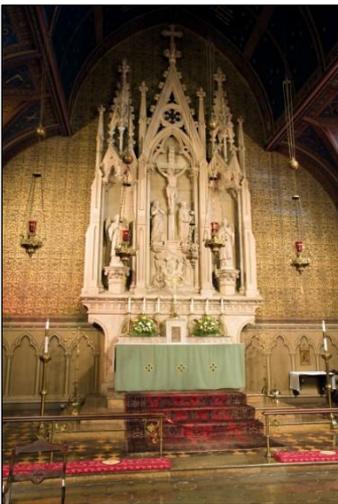
WHY ALL THE RITUALS AROUND THE PRAYERS AND READINGS?

What are we singing?

The service continues with the *Kyrie* and *Gloria* (except in Advent and Lent), two ancient hymns of the church.

What is the priest singing?

The Collect of the Day is the first prayer said by the celebrant. It is specific to the day and ties into the theme of that Sunday, providing a focus for our reflections and meditation during the Mass. Notice that the priest chants the prayer instead of speaking it. In the ancient church, all the prayers and readings were sung, both for their beauty and so to be more easily heard. Grace Church does not use an amplification system except at the ambo (lectern) for the readings and the sermon.



Why is the priest facing that way?

The posture and orientation of the celebrant in prayer both here and throughout the service is ancient and meaningful. The priest joins the people in facing the altar to pray but faces them when addressing them. This orientation highlights that the liturgy is about God and not the priest. Nearly all words

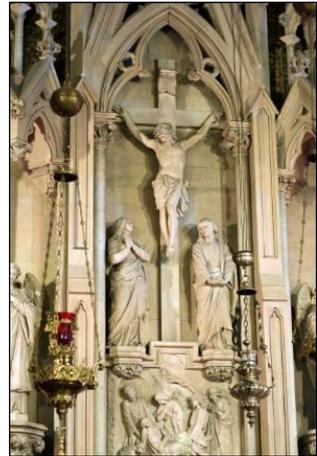
addressed to God are said facing the Altar, which is in fact eastward. Many traditional churches are oriented so that the people and priest, while facing the altar, are facing eastward. East came to symbolize God in the ancient church, as the location of the sunrise and the direction from which Jesus would return in glory.

When do I sit and when do I stand?

The celebrant and the people sit for the readings. In general, we sit to hear readings and the sermon, stand to pray and sing, and kneel to make confession and receive communion. If you don't know whether you should be sitting or standing, follow the lead of the celebrant. Everyone stays seated while a cantor leads the psalm in between the readings, called the gradual psalm, and the people repeat the refrain.

Why is so much special reverence given to the Gospel reading?

Special reverence is given to the gospel, because these are the words and deeds of our Lord. We believe that while all of scripture is inspired by God, the gospels deserve a special place in our faith. It is always sung, rather than read, by a priest or deacon. In preparation, the thurifer approaches the celebrant to "charge" the thurible with fresh incense and bless the incense. The candlebearers ready themselves for the procession of the gospel. Near the end of the sequence hymn, the person who will chant the gospel approaches the altar, takes the gospel book and is led in procession to the ambo during the singing of an Alleluia (or Tract during Lent).



How do I give proper reverence to the gospel?

After approaching the ambo and the chant has concluded, the reader introduces the gospel and the people respond "Glory to you, Lord Christ." All simultaneously make three small signs of the cross with their thumb on their forehead, lips, and chest. This is a sign of reverence for the gospel and also an expression of hope that the gospel of Christ may always be in our minds, on our lips, and in our hearts. The celebrant then censes the

gospel book and begins to chant the gospel according to an ancient mode of chant reserved specifically for the gospel. Having heard the words of the gospel chanted in this inflection, we learn automatically to sense in our bodies that we are hearing holy words. When the priest concludes the gospel, the people respond, "Praise to you, Lord Christ." The priest kisses the book before passing it to the MC.

Why are your sermons so short?

It is the custom to be seated for the sermon after the priest invokes the Trinity "In the Name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen." Our tradition often calls the sermon a homily, because its primary purpose is to illuminate the meaning of the gospel. This may include interpretation of the text, stories, and other illustrations to bring clarity to the meaning of the scriptures and inspiration to hearers, making the words come alive. But our homilies are not lengthy, because we do not believe they are the main focus of our service, and because we believe in a homily less is more. A homily is never intended to entertain and is not teaching in conventional sense, but has the purpose of drawing people closer to the Word of God in our midst and forming them in their faith.

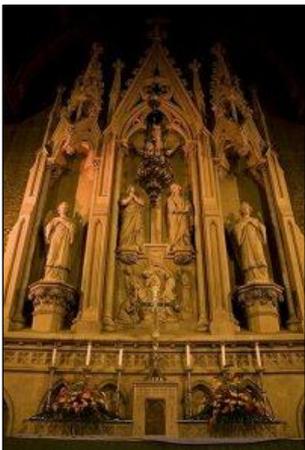
Why do you sing the Creed and the prayers?

The homily is followed by the ancient Nicene Creed, based in apostolic teaching, codified and affirmed by the Council of Nicea of the Fourth Century. It is a summary of the key teachings of our faith, in particular of the belief in the Trinity. It is not intended as a checklist of orthodoxy, though it represents Catholic (or universal) Christian doctrine. These are the traditional teachings of the church, and we should try not to get caught up in them as stumbling blocks to faith. Rather, consider the creed a "symbol" of faith, as the Eastern Orthodox call it, an attempt to explain the mysteries of our faith. It is properly sung as an expression of our faith rather than as a Confession of particular denominational beliefs. The Prayers of the People are chanted by a layperson and express the praise, thanksgiving, and intercessions of the church. We pray daily for the church, the world, our nation, our local community, the sick and suffering, and the departed.

Is confession required before receiving the Blessed Sacrament?

A general confession, absolution, and exchange of the peace prepare us to offer our thanksgiving and receive the Blessed Sacrament, the Body and Blood of Christ. While Anglicans may seek the sacrament of private confession to a priest, they are not required to do so before receiving the Blessed Sacrament. An old Anglican adage about whether private confession to a priest is required is “all may, none must, some should.” Only God knows an individual’s heart and the general confession helps to place us in the right mind of preparation for partaking of the Blessed Sacrament. The priest makes the sign of the cross over the people and pronounces an absolution granted not by the priest’s own authority, but the authority of Christ. The Church believes it is more powerful to hear the words of absolution from a person, rather than a vague notion of forgiveness. It is customary to make the sign of the cross over oneself at the absolution. Again in the exchange of the peace, we both experience the peace of Christ in an encounter with another person, but we also seek to make broken relationships right in preparation for Holy Communion.

WHY PLACE SO MUCH EMPHASIS ON THE EUCHARIST?



What are the preparations for Eucharist?

The service continues seamlessly into its second half and toward its climax, shifting from the Words of God toward the Altar of God. The choir or cantor chants an offertory, while a collection is taken, and brought forward together with bread and wine, and food for the poor. These are the gifts of the people from the bounty of God, that will be transformed by our common prayers into the work of God. Preparation by the ministers happens in the meantime: setting the altar with the communion linens and vessels and books, the priest censuring the gifts and the altar, the censuring of the entire congregation (symbolizing all our being made holy), and the washing of the hands of the priest.

What does the Eucharistic prayer mean?

The Eucharistic prayer, either partially or fully sung, begins with an ancient greeting called the *Sursum Corda* (literally: “Lift up your hearts”). Notice the common triune structure and themes of all three traditional prayers. The preface particular to the current season of the church and the *Sanctus* (Holy, holy, holy...) address God the Father, then the prayer moves into the salvific work of God the Son, the words and actions of the institution of the Sacrament by Christ, our offering of the bread and wine, and concludes with an invocation of God the Holy Spirit to make the bread and wine into the “Body and Blood” of Christ. This highlights the ancient Catholic belief in the Real Presence of Christ in the Mass. It is customary to make the sign of the cross over oneself when the Holy Spirit is invoked to “sanctify us” in our reception of the Sacrament.

Why are the Sacraments elevated, bells rung, and incense used?

A doxology or hymn of praise concludes the Eucharistic Prayer during which time the priest elevates the consecrated bread and wine. Some believe that an actual moment of consecration can be identified either at the words of institution, the invocation of the Spirit, or the conclusion of the prayer. Most Anglicans believe the entirety of the prayer is consecratory. Special signs of reverence are now given for the consecrated Sacrament. The Sacrament is incensed, a bell is rung three times, and the priest genuflects. The people are invited to participate actively in these acts of reverence by making a solemn bow. The Lord’s Prayer follows.

Who can partake of the Blessed Sacrament?

The celebrant breaks the bread and chants a fraction anthem, followed by the traditional *Agnus Dei*. After all the bread has been broken and the wine poured into the chalices, the priest faces the people and shares Christ’s invitation to Communion: “The Gifts of God for the People of God.” We find our dignity in our identity as the people of God, who provides this most essential spiritual food. All the baptized are invited to receive communion. The unbaptized are invited to baptism, as Holy Communion only makes theological sense for those who believe and have become a part of the community through the initiatory rite of baptism.

How do I receive the Blessed Sacrament?

The priest distributes the Blessed Sacrament to all after first partaking. People come forward and kneel or stand at the altar rail. Because the Blessed Sacrament is on the altar, the people may genuflect (if able) rather than solemnly bow as they move in and out of their pews for communion. It is customary to make the sign of the cross over oneself immediately before receiving the Body and Blood of Christ. The priest distributes the bread with a sentence that affirms our belief in the real presence of Christ: "The Body of Christ, the bread of heaven." The cup is distributed with similar words: "The Blood of Christ, the cup of salvation." It is customary for the people to affirm this reality with an "Amen." The bread is received into folded hands with palms facing up (right hand on top of the left). Individuals may either immediately consume the bread and then drink from the chalice, if they desire, or may keep the host on their palm and allow the Eucharistic Minister to dip the bread into the chalice and place it on their tongue. It is customary to wait for the person next to you to receive the chalice before getting up, so as to not disturb that person's devotion or accidentally cause a spill of the chalice.

What do I do after receiving the Blessed Sacrament?

It is appropriate to kneel for a few minutes of silence upon returning to one's pew, to thank God for the gift of the Blessed Sacrament and the work of Christ in our lives. Some remain standing or kneeling until the Blessed Sacrament has been consumed by the ministers.

How do I know when the service is over?

The service concludes with a postcommunion prayer specific to the day, a blessing (or prayer over the people during Lent), and dismissal. While receiving the Eucharist is the most significant blessing, it is customary for the priest to say a short blessing and make the sign of the cross, while the people also make the sign of the cross over themselves. A deacon or priest says the dismissal from the altar, indicating that the service is concluded.

WHAT DO I DO WHEN THE SERVICE IS OVER?

Why is no one getting up?

The procession forms immediately during the final hymn and goes to the All Saints Chapel for a prayer after communion. It is the custom at Grace Church for everyone to sit quietly during the postlude, though you may notice the ministers putting out the candles and cleaning the altar of the sacred objects. Announcements are also made after the conclusion of the postlude. A time of fellowship, often a meal, but at least coffee and refreshments, follows Mass in the Parish Hall.



I hope you found participating in mass at Grace Church meaningful and moving and that this booklet, while not answering every question, at least has provided some insight into our customs of prayer. Do not hesitate to ask questions of parishioners or of me. And if you found yourself not doing things the way others were, do not fret. We offer this booklet not to intimidate anyone, but to set all at ease and prepare us to receive the joy and fullness which God intends for the whole world.



Grace and peace,
Father J. Brent Bates
Rector