From Liturgy to Life – Leader’s Notes

# Week 3: Transformed with Christ

Each heading below relates to a slide

## Prayer

## The Peace

The Peace has rather taken on a life of its own, that makes it hard to think about any of the original reasons for having what St Paul and the early church called “a holy kiss”. It may well have been the use of the holy kiss, rather than referring to meals as agapes or love-feasts, that led to rumours of scandalous behaviour and orgies.

## Positions for the Peace

It seems as if the earliest position for the Peace is where we usually have it, but seen, as the late second century writer Tertullian has it “the seal of prayer”. There are some reasons to think that this was also seen as the appropriate conclusion to household prayers. This may well reflect the idea that we find in Matthew’s gospel: “Again, truly I tell you, if two of you agree on earth about anything you ask, it will be done for you by my Father in heaven.” Matt 18.19

We might note that at least one third century writer seems to have felt the need to stress that the congregation is segregated at this point, and that men kiss men, and women kiss women, just in case anyone gets overenthusiastic.

A later justification for having the peace at this position associates it not with the prayers, but with the preparation of the table, and is based again on a saying of Jesus in Matthew: “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.” Matt 5:23-24

The second position – immediately following the Lord’s Prayer – is the normal position in the Roman Catholic Mass. It makes this sentiment of reconciliation even stronger, and as part of the immediate preparation for receiving Holy Communion. It seems to pick up on praying “forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive those who trespass against us”. In Matthew’s gospel, the Lord’s Prayer is followed immediately by Jesus saying: “For if you forgive others their trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you; but if you do not forgive others, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses.” Matt. 6:14-15

Perhaps whichever position the Peace comes in, it stresses before we receive communion, that, as St John puts it: “those who do not love a brother or sister whom they have seen, cannot love God whom they have not seen” 1 John 4:20

## Groups

Check that you all know each other.

Do any of these ideas go through your head when exchanging the peace? Of the three possible understandings, which do you find the most challenging. We won’t be feeding back from this, so what you say is confidential to your group. *(12 minutes total)*

## The Shape of the Liturgy

One of the most influential books on liturgical revision was written by an Anglo-Catholic monk, Gregory Dix, during WWII, and published in 1945. He argued that while there was no common early liturgical text, there was a common shape. This has influenced all our contemporary liturgy.

## Justin Martyr

The overall shape is seen early on in Justin Martyr, writing in Rome around 150AD.

“And on the day called Sunday, all who live in cities or in the country gather together to one place, and the memoirs of the apostles or the writings of the prophets are read, as long as time permits; then, when the reader has ceased, the president verbally instructs, and exhorts to the imitation of these good things. Then we all rise together and pray, and, as we before said, when our prayer is ended, bread and wine and water are brought, and the president in like manner offers prayers and thanksgivings, according to his ability, and the people assent, saying Amen; and there is a distribution to each, and a participation of that over which thanks have been given.” Readings and Sermon, Prayers, Thanksgiving, Communion – You can see the shape of our Eucharists – all we’ve really added is a longer time spent saying hello and goodbye. But, as you’ll note, we’ve shortened the time spent on the readings: it’s no longer “for as long as time permits.”

## Fourfold Action

The Liturgy of the Sacrament, Dix says, is based on a fourfold (or sevenfold if you count the cup separately) action – Taking, Giving Thanks, Breaking, and Sharing. He is one of the main reasons we have words provided at both the taking and the breaking.

However, taking is clearly the preparatory action to giving thanks, blessing, offering – different ways people have historically and theologically described the eucharistic prayer, and breaking is clearly a preparatory action to sharing. At the heart of this is a twofold action.

## Twofold Action

In what we look at today, we’re really only focussing on two actions – Giving Thanks, and Sharing, which we might expand into “Take with thanks for God to transform”, and “Share with love to know God’s blessing”. And if I put it like that, perhaps you can already begin to see that there’s a parallel between what we enact with the bread and wine, and what, at our best, we hope Jesus is doing with us.

## Worship and Mission

This might be a good moment to remind ourselves of where we started this course, in that twofold action. Some of you may think initially that what we’re looking at is overcomplicated. I hope by the time we’ve finished our exploring it will help us make the connections between our praying and living in some new ways.

## Giving Thanks and Sharing

Very broadly speaking, when we draw near to our remembering of Christ’s offering on the cross in the Eucharist, we want to identify with him as those on whose behalf he offers love and penitence to God to reconcile the world to his Father. It means we know ourselves as offered to God, we assent to being part of Christ’s offering, we join our limited love to his boundless love. When we do so, we are renewed by sharing his risen life as recipients of God’s accepting, welcoming and restoring love. We prayerfully enact a symbolic transformation of bread and wine, because what God does in the crucifixion and resurrection of Jesus, is enact the transformation of the world in Christ. As part of that, we are drawn into our own personal transformation: into becoming what God would have us be.

## Remembrance and Prayer

Another way to put it, which draws us into the content of the eucharistic prayer is to note that giving thanks – remembering what God has done – is blended with prayer, asking that God act now in a way that is consistent with, faithful to, continuous with, the God who he has shown himself to be. This is often how the language of remembering – especially God remembering – works in Scripture: think for example of God speaking after the flood: “When the bow is in the clouds, I will see it and remember the everlasting covenant” Gen 9:16 Or in prayer: “Remember your word to your servant, in which you have made me hope. Psalm 119:49

We remember God’s deeds in creation and redemption: in the first part of the prayer that will have a variable focus. We remember the origin of this sacrament in Jesus interpreting his sacrifice. We remember his self-offering on the cross and God’s response to it in the resurrection. That last intense focus on the crucifixion and glorification of Jesus (technically called the anamnesis – from the Greek word for remembrance) is the pivot from which we move into prayer – prayer for God to act in accordance to his covenant, being true to his character and purpose as revealed in Jesus.

That prayer in one way or another looks forward to the world’s future: renewed lives in a renewed creation, transformed by the loving power of God. We are asking God also to remember Jesus, and bring in the fulfilment of all his promises, the defeat of death and the completion of the resurrection for all creation.

If all that sounds too complicated: let me sum it up. As we remember we are saying in prayer “Thank you that this is who you are God: change the world (and us) to become like you: just, good, holy, perfect in love.”

## Groups

So we’ve explored a link between God transforming the bread and wine to become vehicles for Christ’s life for us, so that God might transform us into vehicles of Christ’s life for others. And we’ve set that in the big picture of God’s transforming the world so that it is filled with God’s living presence.

What might it mean to you to see your daily life as a sacrament of God’s life and love for a) the people you encounter, b) the community you live in, c) the society we share?

Talk for about 15 minutes and be prepared to feed one idea back to the group as a whole.

(If on Zoom, note your group number, and be prepared to report back briefly to the whole learning session.)

## Some Major Themes

Before moving on, I want to draw your attention to four major themes we can find scattered throughout our eucharistic prayers. This is by way of homework. I’m going to invite you to look at the texts in your handout sheets, and we’ll come back and revisit these next week. Which of these big themes do you find easiest (or hardest) to relate to your praying of and thinking about the Eucharist, and which of these themes do you find easiest (or hardest) to relate to everyday life?

The themes are Creation, Incarnation, Cross / Resurrection / Ascension (understood as a single glorification or exaltation of Jesus in the way St John’s gospel puts it), and Kingdom / Final Transformation.

We’ll spend some time exploring each of these next week, but for now I want to move on to the Lord’s Prayer.

## The Our Father

We’ve already talked about the Lord’s Prayer in relation to the Peace, which in the mediaeval church and the current Roman Catholic liturgy, comes at this point as well. And there’s a sense in which you could say the whole of the Our Father is about God’s peace – the Hebrew word Shalom is sometimes used to refer that condition of perfect wholeness and peace that we pray for all God’s creation. But the Our Father is usually reckoned to have ended up here because of the prayer for bread.

The problem we have is that no-one knows what the word Matthew and Luke use in the Lord’s Prayer actually means.

*(Note, slides 16 and 17 form part of an animation sequence to click through from this slide)*

## Epiousion (Animation)

## Epiousion (Meaning)

It can mean something along the lines of “give us today what we need for tomorrow” – i.e. help us have enough to live one day at a time. In that case it would fit with the verses that follow in Matthew – “Don’t store up treasure on earth” “Do not worry about your life, what you will eat and drink.”

However, quite a few ancient interpreters linked it much more with the Eucharist: the bread not just for our *ousia* – our existence, but for our *epiousia* – our super-existence – to nourish our spirit. I don’t think we have to choose between the two. Both invite us to a radical dependence on God. We depend for life neither on our own plans, nor on our own spiritual health. Only when we seek this kind of dependence on God for both our spiritual and physical well-being, will we truly become people, agents, of the kingdom of a far reaching and all-embracing peace, of Shalom.

## Groups

There is a sense in which the whole of the Lord’s prayer is about “on earth as it is in heaven”. The glory of God’s name, the presence of his kingdom, the carrying out of his will, the peace that comes from true reconciliation and forgiveness, the complete dependence on grace for all we have, the escape from temptation and the delivery at last from all and every evil.

This prayer, although not as well-known as it used to be, is still better known than most prayers in our wider society. What does it really mean to pray it? What would it take – and try to answer this in the context of a working business (paid employment or volunteer action), or an aspect of our political and social life – to nudge your workplace, or your local community, towards this kind of Shalom. What does a just and peaceful community look like in practice rather than just as a pious aspiration? (15 minutes)

(If on Zoom, note your group number, and be prepared to report back briefly to the whole learning session.)

### Before Praying

**Homework for next week** – look at page 3 of the notes and those four major themes. Which are most important for you? Which ones could you pay more attention to, both in your praying of the Eucharist, and in your daily living?

## Prayer

(Link <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Eve2y-P-Zjk> for you to play off-screen – pause it after you’ve skipped the adverts, so it’s ready to play, or get an alternative version) This is John Rutter’s Anthem: Deep peace of the running wave to you.