

In our series on the Communion service, we're at 3 out of 4, thinking about the Eucharistic Prayer. Not a history lesson in the developments that have brought us to the 8 choices in CW, or the differences between the Protestant/RC EP nor the differences between Eastern and Western practices. Rather the *purpose* of the EP in our worship and our understanding of it.

If you follow your service sheet closely every week, you may not realise that the EP comprises actions as well as words, these actions actually begin a little earlier with the peace and then continue when the gifts are brought up to the table – but whatever actions we use or prayer we say each one has 3 distinct aspects:

- Thanksgiving
- Memorial
- Sacrifice

and these are always in community.

Being in community requires understanding of the strange ways people act when they're together. Imagine, if you can, a scene at a birthday party for a 10-year old. Knock on the door and an alien enters, friendly – and watches what's going on. Someone's trying to set fire to a cake, people are wearing funny things on their heads, some singing and cheering, lots of brightly wrapped things lie around, balloons bobbing about. Is this normal life? What does an alien/outsider make of all this? It makes sense to us because for us all these things are part of our experience and have significance but without understanding, all these things are just odd. And without understanding, our communion service seems a bit odd too. Where else do you share the same loaf and drink from the same cup and talk about death and resurrection?

But the very essence of the communion service is its uniqueness. It celebrates and encapsulates our whole belief system and has roots that go back thousands of years but is also active here and now and looks forward. But for it to have true value, we need to understand

what we're doing because to break bread and drink wine together is the central act of the Christian faith.

Together – communion is not a private liturgy: it is common, i.e. shared with the Christian community. What we say and do in this service is the high point of our worship. Words and actions together. Some priests don't like the congregation to have the words in front of them, preferring people to listen and watch and for there to be "enough repetition for some texts to **enter the memory and feed the soul.**"

Our current offering of 8 different EPs in CW, does not ditch the old but draws on ancient texts, incorporate some and extends others together with new sources but the pattern of

- Thanksgiving
- Memorial
- Sacrifice

still remains.

Holy Communion sometimes called Eucharist.

Greek EUCHARISTO = thank you Modern Greek EFARISTO
What do you think we are saying thank you for?.....

A straight-forward grace, thanking God for bread and wine that sustains us bodily. In 1 Cor 11 v24, we read that Jesus said thank you

"the Lord Jesus on the night when he was betrayed took a loaf of bread, ²⁴ and when **he had given thanks**, he broke it"

But also, in gratitude for the ultimate gift of Jesus that sustains us spiritually.

And then we remember, again as Jesus told us: Do this Luke 22 v19. You know this. It has entered your memory and it feeds your soul. Value it as a tradition not as a blind habit because you are following the command of Jesus himself as we bring our focus onto the elements that come to represent his sacrifice.

Different churches, traditions, priests manage this in various ways but this is where the action becomes significant. Look! Here is bread. Look! Here is wine. Symbols of the ordinariness of life that represent the extraordinariness of the sacrifice of God himself. The mundane becomes the mysterious.

We remember because it is good to remember. We remember because we are called to remember.

Then we call on the Holy Spirit, in the community of the Trinity, to bless both the elements *and the participants* – lifting us up to the holiest. Eucharist as a thin place – the closest we come to heaven on earth. How to describe it – magical? Wrong idea. Marvellous, gracious, immense, awesome, overwhelming – I think you get the magnitude of the occasion.

Common bread, and our earthly bodies – lifted and blessed to represent, to remember and to rejoice in our promise, our hope of new and incorruptible bodies in eternity.

And finally, sacrifice. Historically, a difficult concept for the protestant church, bit of a dirty word. OK with thanksgiving and remembering – but sacrifice? Thankfully our liturgists have rediscovered and embraced the concept. How could they not given was is written in 1 Corinthians 11 v24-26?

‘This is my body, which is given for you... This cup is the new covenant in my blood.. whenever you eat this bread and drink this cup, you proclaim the Lord’s death until he comes.’

What we believe is consolidated by what we say, so it’s important to say it with understanding. Lex orandi <-> lex credendi.

We believe in the sacrifice of Jesus, once, for all people.
Jesus, the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world.
Jesus, the Lamb of God who has mercy on us.
Jesus, the Lamb of God who gives us peace.

Do we believe it because we say it or do we say it because we believe it?

‘This is my body, which is given for you... This cup is my blood that is poured out for you.’ Luke 22 v19,20

Jesus gave himself for us and in this meal we give thanks, we remember and we recall his sacrifice. **Jesus is recognised in the meal** as those on the road to Emmaus recognised him:

So he went in to stay with them. ³⁰ When he was at the table with them, he took bread, blessed and broke it, and gave it to them. ³¹ Then their eyes were opened, and they recognized him... Then they told what had happened on the road, and how he had been made known to them in the breaking of the bread. Luke 24 v29-31, 34

Our EP is profoundly symbolic in both words and actions. We proclaim and celebrate together what God has done for us in Jesus and continues to do for us every day. So let’s come to his table with understanding, joy and thankfulness.

The Lord is here: **His Spirit is with us.**

Refs:

Beyond Common Worship Earey, M
Why Go to Church? Radcliffe, T
Do This Stevenson, K
The Meal Jesus Gave Us Wright, T