Episcopal Liturgy Glossary

HOLY EUCHARIST

The central act of worship in The Episcopal Church is Holy Eucharist. The name comes from the Greek word for “thanksgiving,” as this liturgy places the Great Thanksgiving—the blessing and sharing of Holy Communion—at the center of our focus. The shape of this practice traces back to the ancient Church, with the oldest available liturgical source dating to the 3rd century. In celebrating Holy Eucharist, worshipers share in the sacrament of Christ’s presence, and by partaking of the Body of Christ we become members of his Body, sent forth in love and service.

RITE II

The Episcopal Church is a liturgical tradition, meaning our practice of corporate worship is grounded in the structure of the Liturgy. The basic shape and elements of the Liturgy are largely unchanged since the earliest days of the Church, though the language has evolved over time.

There are two forms provided in the Book of Common Prayer, Rite I (“traditional” or generally Elizabethan English) and Rite II (“contemporary” or generally modern English). Additional supplements have been authorized since the current BCP was approved in 1979. We make use of some of these elements, which are organized in a collection called Enriching Our Worship.

WORD AND TABLE

The structure of our liturgy consists of two major parts: the service of word and the service of table.

The service of Word (sometimes called antecommunion because it takes place before communion) is focused on the readings from scripture. Prayers and music frame these readings, and after hearing them we respond with a time of teaching called the sermon, we recite the creed that encapsulates our faith, and we offer our prayers to God.

The service of Table is focused on the act of sharing Holy Communion. Having said a general confession, heard the reminder of God’s forgiveness, and shared the peace with one another, we approach the table in a state of grace as ones who are striving for reconciliation before sharing in what is sometimes called the sacrament of unity. The priest says the prayer of consecration called the Great Thanksgiving, and immediately shares the bread and wine with those gathered. Once completed, we are sent out with a blessing and charged to go forth as participants in God’s ministry to the world.

CELEBRANT

Although it may be said all who gather for the Eucharist are celebrating it, the Episcopal tradition generally refers to the gathered assembly as “the People” while referring to the leader of the service as “the Celebrant.” The celebrant leads the community's celebration of sacramental liturgies and other rites. When present, the bishop is normally the celebrant, but in our week to week life, this role falls to the priest.

OPENING ACCLAMATION

The Celebrant initiates the time of worship with a salutation or greeting in the opening dialogue of the eucharistic liturgy and the congregation voices the response. The specific words of the acclamation vary according to the season.

COLLECT FOR PURITY

The liturgy begins with special prayers called collects (pronounced CALL-ects). These prayers are meant to collect us together and orient our attention toward what God's Spirit is doing in the midst of our sacred gathering.

The Collect for Purity is used at the beginning of most Anglican rites for Holy Eucharist. The prayer first appeared in Latin in a 10th century sacramentary (altar book) at a Benedictine abbey in the German city of Fulda. Although credit is often given to Thomas Cranmer for translating this prayer into English for the first Book of Common Prayer in 1549, the prayer was first translated into English by the anonymous 14th century mystic who wrote The Cloud of Unknowing, where it is rendered:

O God unto whom all hearts lie open
unto whom desire is eloquent
and from whom no secret thing is hidden;
purify the thoughts of my heart
by the outpouring of your Spirit
that I may love with a perfect love
and praise you as you deserve. Amen.

The Collect for Purity has remained a fixture in the Anglican liturgy for centuries and serves as an invocation to prepare the congregation for worship. This complements the ritual passing of the Peace in framing the liturgy of the word as a time for preparing the assembly to share in communion at the Table, where we are fully known and will one day be gathered in perfect peace, by the God who loves and invites all.

SONG OF PRAISE (GLORIA)

After the opening song and before the collect of the day we sing the Song of Praise. This is commonly called the Gloria because in the traditional form of the liturgy the congregation sings (or says, if there's no choir) a hymn that begins, "Glory to God in the highest, and peace to his people on earth." While the entrance song is usually a triumphal piece that accompanies the procession of ministers into the church, this song is meant to focus our hearts on the greatness and virtues of God that merit our praise and adoration.

COLLECT OF THE DAY

After the entrance rite (opening song, collect for purity, and song of praise), the Celebrant prays the Collect of the Day. As the name suggests, this is a particular prayer that changes week by week, following the Book of Common Prayer, beginning on page 211.

The collects of the day largely come from long traditions of use. Sources include the 1549 Book of Common Prayer composed by Thomas Cranmer, the Leonine or

Verona sacramentary (6th century), the Gallican Missale Francorum (8th century), and the Gelasian sacramentary (8th century).

A collect (CALL-ect) sums up our prayers as we gather and orient our attention toward what God's Spirit is doing in the midst of our sacred assembly.

Collects follow a three-part structure:

1. The preamble addresses God and may include an ascription that justifies or contextualizes our request, such as, "O God, you have taught us to keep all your commandments by loving you and our neighbor."
2. The petition is what we are asking God to do, such as "grant us the grace of your Holy Spirit, that we may be devoted to you with our whole heart, and united to one another with pure affection."
3. The conclusion may identify the means or member of the Trinity who mediates our request. We pray "through Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever."

And like all prayers, a collect ends by the whole assembly affirming it with an "Amen" (an ancient Hebrew word meaning something like "so be it" or "certainly").

OLD TESTAMENT READING

Tracing all the way back to its ancient Jewish roots, the Christian order for worship has always included readings from scripture. The first reading is always a reading from the Hebrew Bible. In the Jewish tradition this is called the Tanakh, which is an acronym for the Hebrew bible based on its three main sections: Torah (Law), Nevi'im (Prophets), and Ketuvim (Writings). Scripture was read by someone who was literate for all to hear.

In those days, there were far fewer people who were literate, and copies of these texts were not as easily available as they are in today's world. Nearly all worshipers used only their ears to receive the words of scripture. Today, perhaps you might try doing the same by closing your eyes during the readings or otherwise looking away from the screens.

RESPONSE (PSALM)

Between the readings there is usually a response or song to help us reflect on what we've just heard before focusing on the next portion of scripture.

A psalm is an ancient Hebrew song. While the original tunes and melodies may have been lost over time, we have good reason to believe it sounded something like plainchant, which consists of a small range of notes and is meant to encourage congregational participation. This is why we always recite the psalms together.

Though the response is usually a psalm, hearkening back to ancient Jewish practice, it can also sometimes be a canticle or other song.

READINGS

In ancient practice Scripture was read by someone who was literate for all to hear in the assembly. Tracing all the way back to its ancient Jewish roots, the Christian order for worship has always included readings from scripture. The first reading is

always a reading from the Hebrew Bible, followed by a response (usually from the Psalms). As Christians gathered on their own, they often added to these by hearing a reading from a letter to the churches (such as the letter to the Colossian church) which were widely copied as disciples traveled and as the letters' apostolic authority and broad applicability came to be recognized. They also listened to the story of Jesus from one of the Four Gospels.

NEW TESTAMENT READING

The second reading, tracing all the way back to the earliest Christian communities, would come from a pastoral epistle (usually a copy of one of Paul's letters or a letter from one of the other apostles). Finally, they would listen to a portion of a gospel text to learn about the life of Jesus.

The gift of scripture is a vital part of our celebration when we gather to worship. At the end of a reading, you'll hear the lector say one of these statements:

The Word of the Lord.

Here ends the Reading.

Hear what the Spirit is saying to the churches.

The Word of God for the People of God.

Our response, "Thanks be to God," follows. We say this even when the reading isn't something we feel particularly grateful for because our tradition reminds us of the countless people who have carried these scriptures forward. Age by age, they have hand scribed, type set, illustrated, and bound these sacred texts in scrolls and books so that these words of humanity's experience of God could be passed on as a gift from generation to generation. These words offer challenge as often as comfort, they compel us to cultivate understanding, and open our senses to God's activity in our own day. Thanks be to God.

GOSPEL HYMN

The response that follows the New Testament reading and precedes the Gospel is a Gospel Hymn. This music also serves as "traveling music" while the deacon or other clergy carry the Gospel book into the midst of the congregation.

GOSPEL

The Gospel reading is normally said by a member of the clergy—a deacon, if present, or by a priest. The shape of the liturgy as it progresses reading by reading reaches a crescendo as the words of Jesus are repeated. This is why the Gospel has a different introduction and conclusion than the other readings. The reader proclaims "The Gospel of the Lord," to which we respond "Glory to you, Lord Christ" and "Praise to you, Lord Christ." Even when the day's selection is difficult, we praise Christ with the humility that our understanding is limited and the hope that our own questions and thoughts may be pleasing to God.

Have you noticed the way some people turn to face the Gospel book as it is carried to the middle of the room to be read?

We physically turn toward the action of our liturgy. This includes both turning toward the Gospel as well as the Cross when they are on the move. In this way we take

small tangible practices that help us to think about less tangible but often more important spiritual practices as we train our hearts and our minds to follow the action of God by looking to the cross and directing our ears toward the proclamation of the Gospel.

SERMON

After the congregation has gathered, prayed, and heard readings from scripture, someone appointed gives a sermon. There are no official rubrics or definitions for a sermon in the Book of Common Prayer or in the canons (bylaws) of The Episcopal Church. However, a sermon is simply a message given to educate or exhort those assembled by explaining the meaning of a reading, or by discussing something important in the spiritual life of the congregation. In the earliest days, even the preacher was seated during this part of the liturgy, sitting on a stool which in Latin was called a *cathedra*.

NICENE CREED

The recitation of a creed marks a turn in the Liturgy of the Word as the congregation has heard and inwardly digested the words of scripture, and now begins a series of collective spoken responses in one voice and one spirit.

The Nicene Creed is always recited at a Sunday Eucharist. However, the Apostles' Creed is recited instead on baptismal occasions. Both creeds originate in the 4th century, and have served through the centuries to encompass what is orthodox in the Christian faith.

Due to its placement directly after the sermon, it is sometimes said that the orthodoxy of the creed is meant to correct any mistakes or accidental blaspheming in the sermon.

PRAYERS OF THE PEOPLE

After the creed, an intercessor leads the people in saying the Prayers of the People. The Book of Common Prayer offers six different forms this can take (today we are using an adaptation of form IV), but none of these forms are mandatory. The rubrics simply direct worshipers to pray collectively for:

The Universal Church, its members, and its mission
The Nation and all in authority
The welfare of the world
The concerns of the local community
Those who suffer and those in any trouble
The departed (with commemoration of a saint when appropriate)

The forms for these petitions come from the Book of Common Prayer (starting on page 383). In some, the responses are uniform, while in others, the responses vary according to the petition. The form we use varies by season as we use all six forms in the prayer book throughout the year.

CONFESSION AND ABSOLUTION

To conclude the congregation's affirmation of faith and prayers for the Church and the world, the liturgy continues with a general confession. Unlike private confession

(also called Reconciliation) where an individual names specific trespasses and sins, this general confession is constructed for the entire assembly to receive the assurance of Christ's forgiveness and absolution. The liturgy places the prayer of confession here, just before the offertory and Holy Communion, in observance of Jesus' teaching in Matthew 5:24, "leave your gift there before the altar and go; first be reconciled to your brother or sister."

THE PEACE

A liturgical exchange of greeting through word and gesture. It is a sign of reconciliation, love, and renewed relationships in the Christian community. The passing of the Peace is an ancient Christian practice. It has been associated with Rom 16:16, "Greet one another with a holy kiss," and similar passages such as 1 Cor 16:20. The earliest references to the peace may be found in writings concerning the baptismal liturgies in the 2nd century.

In the late middle ages, a wooden plaque or plate with a projecting handle was used to pass the peace without direct personal contact. It had an image of the crucifixion or another religious subject on the face. Known as a Pax Board, it was first kissed by the celebrant, and then passed to other ministers and members of the congregation who also kissed it. The custom of passing the peace by use of a Pax Board is now obsolete.

Today, passing the Peace usually resembles a casual moment to greet the other worshipers we're gathered with. The greeting is a symbol that helps us to pause and recognize that worship is not a form of entertainment to consume but a practice to participate in, and that we gather in this assembly not as individuals on separate paths but as members of a divine community drawn onto the path of Jesus, who is the Prince of Peace.

OFFERTORY

One of the first things we do as we begin to prepare the table for Holy Communion is to gather the gifts of bread and wine. Special attention is also given to other ways our gifts support our congregational life and collective worship. Offering plates are passed to collect monetary gifts that sustain our parish, along with newcomer cards to recognize the gift of those who enter our circle of fellowship. Other gifts are impossible to perfectly represent, but as we each touch the plates we can think of the time and special talents we all bring into this body.

Through the consecratory prayer of communion (the Great Thanksgiving) the gifts of bread and wine become the Body and Blood of Christ's Presence. In our sharing, we too become part of his Body the Church along with all those gifts we bring in love and joy.

DOXOLOGY

"Words of glory" (from the Greek doxa logos) or "praise to God," we sing "Praise God from whom all blessings flow" as we present our offered gifts to God. It is customary to elevate the gifts of the Offertory in gratitude to God while singing the Doxology.

GREAT THANKSGIVING

The Great Thanksgiving (or Eucharistic Prayer) is a form of prayer used to consecrate communion for the Church. There are six different forms of this prayer in the *Book of Common Prayer* alone. All date back to the early 3rd century liturgy of Hippolytus, this prayer generally consists of six parts. The first three are: / The last three are:

1. SURSUM CORDA

The whole prayer begins with a responsive acclamation called the *Sursum Corda* (Latin “lift up your hearts”) which opens the prayer and invites the whole assembly to participate in it.

2. NARRATIVE OF SALVATION

The narrative of thanksgiving includes three parts: the preface, the sanctus, and the narrative itself. A preface that recounts the reasons why it is fitting to offer this prayer to God culminating in the *Sanctus* (Latin “holy”), which is typically sung by the whole congregation. The *Sanctus* consists of two portions of scripture: Isaiah 6:3 and Mark 11:9-10. The celebrant then continues the thanksgiving with a narrative of God’s plan of salvation that led to the person of Jesus Christ.

3. WORDS OF INSTITUTION

The *Verba* (Latin “words”) are the words of institution wherein Christ offered bread and wine to his disciples at the Last Supper, saying, “This is my Body which is given for you” and “This is my Blood of the new Covenant which is poured out for you.” After each set of words, an acolyte may ring bells to call our attention to Christ’s presence in the bread and wine, as we are all called to “Do this in remembrance of me.”

4. ANAMNESIS

The *Anamnesis* (Greek “remembrance” or “not forgetting”) follows Jesus’s command to remember. Typically, the whole assembly joins in saying a memorial acclamation, “Christ has died, Christ is risen, Christ will come again.” This remembrance includes the offering (or oblation) of the bread and wine that will be for us a sharing in the offering of Christ’s body and blood.

5. EPICLESIS

The Celebrant then invokes the Holy Spirit through the words of the Epiclesis (Greek “invocation”) to make the bread and wine to become for us the Body and Blood of Christ as well as to make us into Christ’s Body as we partake of it. It is common for worshipers to make the sign of the cross over themselves as a sign of receiving this sanctification.

6. DOXOLOGY

The whole Eucharistic Prayer comes to a close with a doxology ascribing praise to God for ever. The People affirm this prayer by saying together the great *AMEN*. In joining with saying this *amen* (Aramaic “truth” or “so may it be”), the whole assembly takes part in concluding the prayer as the bread and wine are now sacramentally made

the Body and Blood of Christ. It is common to bow the head in reverence of this moment, and an acolyte may ring bells to call our attention to Christ's Presence in the now-consecrated bread and wine, his Body and Blood.

EUCHARISTIC PRAYER B

The prayer used to celebrate communion is called a Eucharistic Prayer, or (in English) Great Thanksgiving. Another term you might see in a more academic setting is *Anaphora*. During this season we have been Eucharistic Prayer B (found on pages 367-369 of the *Book of Common Prayer*). Its structure shares a lot in common with Prayer A, but it is essentially a hybrid of a modern anaphora with the oldest anaphora we have. That is, the 3rd century anaphora written by Hippolytus of Rome; and the 1970 one written by then Rev. Frank T. Griswold (who later went on to become Presiding Bishop of The Episcopal Church from 1998–2006). Prayer B contains a wealth of theological imagery, including Biblical allusions from 2 Thessalonians 2:13-14, Ephesians 1:9-11, Ephesians 1:21-23, Hebrews 11:16, Colossians 1:15-20, and Hebrews 5:9.

EUCHARISTIC PRAYER C

The form of Great Thanksgiving we use today is Eucharistic Prayer C. Like prayers from the Eastern Church, it includes more congregational responses. These are drawn from scripture, including: Galatians 1:5, Revelation 4:11, Psalm 51, Isaiah 53:5, Isaiah 6:3, Psalm 118:26, Luke 13:35, and Luke 24:35.

The narrative of salvation in Prayer C places a special emphasis on the creation, beginning with the creation of galaxies, building with the primal human race, expanding with the Old Testament drama of God's continuing effort to draw God's people back, and reaching its climax with the proclamation of the incarnation and atonement.

A particularity that has been corrected in the Anglican Church of Canada is the nontraditional placement of the epiclesis (the invocation of the Holy Spirit to make the bread and wine to be the Body and Blood). Prayer C places the epiclesis before the words of institution (this is my body… this is my blood) instead of after the memorial acclamation (we celebrate his death and resurrection, as we await the day of his coming) as other eucharistic prayers do.

Prayer C also preserves some echoes of penitence from the 1549 Book of Common Prayer with the petition for God to accept these prayers and praises. Its scope builds dramatically from the formation of the universe to the exaltation of Christ as our great High Priest (Hebrews 4:14).

ENRICHING OUR WORSHIP

There are a great variety of liturgical resources in The Episcopal Church: the Book of Common Prayer (1979) as well as many others including a collection called Enriching Our Worship (1997), which we'll be using this season.

LORD'S PRAYER

Immediately after the bread and wine are consecrated, we pray the Lord's Prayer. This prayer of Jesus was given to his disciples as an example of how they should pray. The phrase "Lord's Prayer" is not used in the New Testament, but comes

from tradition. The prayer is found in Matthew 6:9-13 as part of the Sermon on the Mount and in Luke 11:2-4 when Jesus and the disciples are on the road to Jerusalem. Luke's version is shorter and more compact than Matthew's. Scholars have argued that the Lord's Prayer was originally part of the “Q” source and that Luke's version is probably closer to the original.

As a prayer, the Lord's Prayer is similar to Jewish prayers. It begins with an address to God the Father, continues with petitions which ask God to act in a way which would achieve his purposes, and then has petitions which ask for God's help. The traditional closing, the doxology, is probably a later addition. It is not found in Luke nor in all the manuscripts of Matthew's gospel. The Lord's Prayer is said at Baptism, Eucharist, the Daily Offices, and other services of the Episcopal Church. The Book of Common Prayer includes both contemporary and traditional language versions of the Lord's Prayer (see BCP, p. 364).

This prayer helps us to prepare to receive the Body and Blood of Christ. Following the great AMEN of the Great Thanksgiving prayer, the Lord’s Prayer extends that AMEN as it recalls and reveals to us what it means to partake of Christ’s presence in receiving Holy Communion.

BREAKING OF THE BREAD (FRACTION)

The part of the Eucharist where the Communion bread is broken by the Celebrant. According to the prayer book, a period of silence is to follow, and then we say "Alleluia. Christ our Passover is sacrificed for us. Therefore let us keep the feast. Alleluia."

FRACTION ANTHEM

When possible, the breaking of the bread is followed with a song called a Fraction Anthem. This song draws our attention to the Body of Christ that has been broken and offered for us. During this time, the Celebrant prepares additional vessels as necessary to distribute communion.

COMMUNION

There is a fourfold action of the liturgy that dates back to the Last Supper and even earlier in ancient Jewish tradition: Take, Bless, Break, Give. Having taken the bread and wine, blessed them through the Great Thanksgiving prayer, and broken the bread, the Celebrant then begins the time of communion when the bread (Body) and wine (Blood) are given to the congregation. The Celebrant customarily consumes first before giving it to others, not out of conceit, but because we acknowledge we cannot give what we have not first received.

COMMISSIONING OF LAY EUCHARISTIC VISITORS

For the sake of those who are unable to be present with us during our time of worship, the Church has long practiced the ministry of bringing the communion elements from the Table to those who are homebound. As we commission the lay eucharistic ministers to carry this out we acknowledge the importance of remembering those who are absent as well as the nature of Christ to seek out those who are separated from the rest of the body of the faithful.

POSTCOMMUNION PRAYER

We conclude our time of worship by offering one more prayer, this time a prayer of gratitude for the gift of Christ's presence. Through this prayer we proclaim that in receiving his body and blood, we are transformed into members of his body, and so pray for God's Spirit to aid us as we go forth to continue Christ's ministry on earth.

BENEDICTION

The Celebrant prays a blessing over the congregation at the end of service to invoke God's favor upon them as they go forth. This benediction can take many forms as appropriate to the occasion.

DISMISSAL

When the procession out has begun and the liturgy reaches its end as it is time for the people to go out, a deacon or a priest offers a final dismissal that reminds us what we are being sent out to do. Let us bless the Lord.

SEASON AFTER EPIPHANY

In this season after Epiphany, we hear the stories of Christ beginning his ministry. In this week's portion of the Gospel of Luke, we hear from a collection of teachings organized together as the Sermon on the Plain. This season is all about how people come to recognize Jesus and his divine nature, from the visit of the Magi to the calling of the disciples and the gathering of the multitudes, and culminating in his miraculous transfiguration. How do you hear his divinity shine through his teachings as we hear them today?

LENT

The season of Lent is the Church's way of preparing to hear the story of Christ's Resurrection, a story that would lose all its power without understanding the road that led to Christ's opposition, betrayal, and death. Life and death are weighty matters, therefore we handle them with care and reverence. This attention carries over into our abstention from displaying flowers at the altar, veiling the cross, and other forms of collective and personal piety.

ASH WEDNESDAY

The first of the forty days of Lent, named for the custom of placing blessed ashes on the foreheads of worshipers at Ash Wednesday services. The ashes are a sign of penitence and a reminder of mortality, and may be imposed with the sign of the cross. Ash Wednesday is observed as a fast in the church year of the Episcopal Church. The liturgy for the Ash Wednesday service is found in the section for Proper Liturgies for Special Days in the Book of Common Prayer (p. 264). Imposition of ashes at the Ash Wednesday service is optional.

Lent is a season of the church year that lasts forty days (excluding Sundays, which are always observed as a feast of the Resurrection). Lent is often described as a penitential season, meaning that it particularly highlights the theological themes of mercy, our need for God's help, and our veneration of Christ's willingness to endure

scorn and suffering. Many Christians mark this season by adopting voluntary penitential practices. These practices may include special prayers, fasting, contemplation, and charity.

The ashes for Ash Wednesday are made from burning the palms of the preceding year's Palm Sunday celebration. In burning these palms worshipers are reminded how all worldly triumph turns to dust. Having these ashes imposed on our foreheads involves our senses in meditating on our mortality. There is sometimes some critique of this practice because of the admonition by Jesus in Matthew 6:5-18 to avoid making a spectacle of our devotional practices, although Jesus later seems to approve of the practice of using ashes as a sign of repentance in Matthew 11:21, so it's likely that Jesus's objection was not to the ashes themselves but to pride and haughtiness, of performing these practices for superficial gain rather than exercising them as part of personal transformation.

All are welcome to receive the imposition of ashes on Ash Wednesday, that we all may contemplate what it means to be mortal and then revere all the more the wonder of God's love and inspire us to greater humility and compassion as we exercise our faith.

THE GREAT LITANY

This was the first original English language liturgy, published by Thomas Cranmer in 1544, and a cornerstone of the creation of the Book of Common Prayer. The Great Litany is an especially appropriate part of our entry into the Lenten season. Through it we pray for all aspects of our lives, our world, and the great need for compassion and healing.

When the Great Litany is used before a Eucharist, the usual Prayers of the People and Confession are omitted.

THE SUNDAY OF THE PASSION: PALM SUNDAY

The dual nature of the Liturgy for this Sunday is evident from the title. It begins with the pomp and glory of the triumphal entry into Jerusalem with shouts of "Hosanna" to our King. These hosannas soon change to "Crucify him, crucify him," as the Passion is narrated and dramatically proclaimed…

The people should be given full opportunity to sing their praises at the procession and to cry their condemnation during the Passion. We are all part of this great drama, for it is the mystery of God's redemption of the world through his only-begotten Son. The strength of this day is in its paradox. The truth of this day is that we all are responsible, through our sins, for the Passion and Death of our Lord. The glory of this day is that we know by faith the truth of the Resurrection and the promise of everlasting life "with him who suffered and died for us, and rose again."

A Priest's Handbook, Dennis G. Michno, p. 173.

Christ became obedient to the point of death even death on a cross. Therefore God also highly exalted him and gave him the name that is above every name.

— Philippians 2:8-9

GOOD FRIDAY

In the Episcopal tradition, Good Friday is not a funeral for Jesus. It is part of the Triduum, a three-day liturgy spanning Christ's betrayal, execution, and rising to life again. The observance of Good Friday includes veneration of the cross. While stark and bare, we are reminded of the triumph of the cross, which is the triumph of Christ's love over fear, over violence, and over death.

WAY OF THE CROSS

During the seasons of Lent and Easter we display fourteen special works of art that depict the fourteen *Stations of the Cross*. This traditional devotion contemplates Christ's passion, recalling a series of events that led from his condemnation to his death and burial. This devotion is especially appropriate during Lent as it helps us in focusing on his sorrow to lay the foundation for his triumph and joy. If you'd like to take time to observe this devotion, booklets are available at the back of the sanctuary.

THE GREAT VIGIL OF EASTER

The Great Vigil of Easter is the culmination of the sacred celebration of Holy Week and the beginning of the celebration of the Lord's Resurrection. It is the climax of the Christian Year and unfolds in Scripture, psalm, Sacrament and liturgy the story of redemption. It begins in darkness and proceeds toa joyous burst of light. It begins in silence and proceeds to the glorious proclamation of the Paschal Alleluia.

It is the Christian Passover, for it celebrates the passing from death to life, from sin to grace. The story of the Exodus is central to the Liturgy of the Word; Baptism is the means of the full realization of redemption; Holy Communion is the promise of the glory that shall be ours with our Risen Lord.

This liturgy moves with austere solemnity from one part to the next, as we watch and wait for the Lord's Resurrection. It is not to be rushed through, for time is suspended as we recount the story of creation, celebrate the glory of the New Creation in the waters of Baptism, and profess our faith in the perfection of all creation in the fullness of time, in the glory of God.

Of all the celebrations of the Church Year, the Great Vigil of Easter is pre-eminent, for it alone vividly and dramatically portrays all that was, that is, and that ever shall be in the drama of our redemption:

Christ yesterday and today, the Beginning and the End, the Alpha and Omega. His are the times and ages and to him be glory and dominion through all ages of eternity. Amen.

Dennis G. Michno, *A Priest's Handbook*, page 201.

EASTERTIDE

During the great fifty days of Easter, you may notice that our usual reading from the Hebrew Scriptures is replaced by a reading from the Acts of the Apostles. As we especially celebrate the Lord's resurrection, our lectionary draws our attention to the activity of the earliest disciples in sharing the news of Christ's resurrection and the good news of his new life. This testimony is frequently accompanied by conversion, baptism,

and incorporation into the emerging Church, which in those days was simply named The Way.

PENTECOST

The name Pentecost means “fiftieth day,” which is when the Jewish festival of Shavuot (Heb. “week”) or the Feast of Weeks took place after the Passover. This Jewish holiday celebrates the gift of the Torah to the Israelites at Mt. Sinai. The story in Numbers 11 tells of how God poured out the Spirit on those who were sent to expand what had been started through the prophet Moses. This miracle is recalled and renewed in the room where the disciples gathered on Pentecost and again as we affirm our baptismal promises.

GIFT OF THE SPIRIT

Wind rushes in, divine lights like fire illuminate the disciples, and they begin to speak in many languages. Today, the Christian celebration has grown quite apart from its Jewish roots. In the context of Jesus’ commissioning the apostles and ascending to heaven, the gift of the Holy Spirit empowers them to carry on God’s work of reconciliation and liberation in the world. As we’ve seen in the stories from the Acts of the Apostles, the Spirit was indeed with them. And we proclaim today that the Spirit is with us still, compelling us into ministry as she has for generations.

BABEL

The book of Genesis is full of many stories called etiologies—tales meant to explain how things came to be, how places or people got their names, and how God has been active in directing the world. Just as the story of the Tower of Babel is meant to explain why there are so many different languages and cultures in the world, the story of Pentecost is sometimes described as a “reverse Babel” as the gathered assembly miraculously understand what is being spoken as if in their own language. Influences in today’s service from other languages and cultures are meant to celebrate the miraculous sign of Pentecost and God’s desire to draw all people together.

TRINITY

Today is the Sunday when we celebrate the mystical glory of God’s diverse unity in the Trinity. You may have seen some analogy before attempting to explain this. Yet somehow the Trinity remains inexplicable. Perhaps that can provide some reassurance as we remember our faith is not about finding all the answers, but being able to hold space for the questions; not rushing to untangle the divine, but allowing it to draw us in its own time.

ORDINARY TIME

The Sundays after Pentecost are known as Ordinary Time. This title comes from the way we number the weeks (ordinal numbers), but we might also draw from it the reminder of how God has ordained or set apart the ministry of the whole Church to love and serve the world.

While the part of the church calendar that runs from Advent through Easter forms a continuous narrative from the anticipation of Christ, his birth, earthly ministry, passion, and resurrection; the weekly readings in this part of the church year generally reflect on the life and growth of the Church. We hear about Jesus sending disciples out to minister on his behalf, and we hear about humans trying through earthly means to imitate God's rulership (with predictably mixed success).

Use of green as the liturgical color for this season evokes the green pastures where God our Shepherd leads us, and reminds us of the verdant life and emergent vitality that comes through faith.