



Service of Word and Sacrament: An Explanation

Written by Pastor Wayne Schultz (with slight adaptations)

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Part Three: The Sacrament and Our Response

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The Sacrament

We have arrived at the second of the twin peaks of Service of Word and Sacrament. In Holy Communion we receive Jesus' true body and blood for the forgiveness of sins and the strengthening of our faith. With our burdens we flee to this great and joyous feast to be united with Christ and to receive his forgiving gifts of mercy and peace.

Preface

The Communion liturgy begins with the Preface. This sets the tone for what is about to occur. The responsive verses on page 33 unite us with the Church of the past and the future. This Dialogue between pastor and congregation has been used for at least 1,800 years. They are joyous words that anticipate the forthcoming reception of the means of grace. "The Lord be with you" – without him we can do nothing, least of all stand before the Lord of hosts. "Lift up your hearts" – in a glad welcome to him. "Let us give thanks to the Lord our God" – the only fitting thing to do when he comes to us with his amazing gifts.

Seasonal Sentence

The seasonal sentence follows. These sentences highlight important events and truths in the gospels. They reflect the spirit and flavor of the seasons of the church year.

Holy, Holy, Holy (Sanctus)

The words leading into "Holy, Holy, Holy," the song of the angels, remind us that we are joining all the company of heaven to praise the Lamb who was slain, who sits on the throne, and who comes to his people today in Word and Sacrament. What a splendid opportunity to join the multitude of angels and all those Christians who have died in faith in singing this song of praise to God!

This canticle is a festive part of our liturgy. God's people have never stopped singing the angel's song from Isaiah 6:3. This version of the song includes several phrases from the great Easter psalm, Psalm 118. We sing with the psalmist, "You are my God, and I will exalt you. I will give you thanks for you have become my salvation." May this awesome

triumph song of saints and angels soar among us as we share in the joy of salvation!

The pastor will now lead us through the Preface and “Holy, Holy, Holy.”

Words of Institution

The words of Christ in all their splendor, mystery and simplicity stand alone in Service of Word and Sacrament. These are the very words our Lord spoke when he instituted the Sacrament on the night in which he was betrayed. These words, along with the eating and drinking, are the chief things in the Sacrament. They tell us of the blessing we receive through the eating and drinking, that is, the forgiveness of sins, life, and salvation. They tell us that he is bodily present in, with, and under the bread and wine. All is in readiness for the feast of God’s forgiveness. Come to the feast!

The Peace

Following the Words of Institution, the pastor extends the peace of Christ to God’s people. He says, “The peace of the Lord be with you always.” Martin Luther called these words a “public absolution of the sins of the communicants, the true voice of the gospel announcing remission of sins, and therefore the one and most worthy preparation for the Lord’s table, if faith holds to these words as coming from the mouth of Christ himself.”

The pastor will speak the Words of Institution and the Peace. We will respond by singing “Amen.”

O Christ, Lamb of God (Agnus Dei)

In the canticle “O Christ, Lamb of God,” we sing as spiritual beggars. We cry out to our Lord, the Lamb of God, to have mercy on us and deliver us from slavery to sin. The words are based on John 1:29, Isaiah 53:7, and Revelation 5:6ff. This is an intimate and penitential prayer of the Church to its head, Jesus.

We join in singing “O Christ, Lamb of God.” (CW p. 35)

The Distribution

Christ is here to give himself to us in the bread and the wine of the Sacrament. Joyfully, yet reverently, we approach the altar. After the reception we return to our places and joyfully give him thanks.

During the Distribution, songs of praise and thanks are often sung. The hymns chosen for this time are not always limited to the hymns in the Communion section of the hymnal. Seasonal hymns that celebrate the salvation won by Christ are also appropriate.

Thursday – During the Distribution on Thursday we will not sing the hymns. You may wish to read through the selected hymns.
Sunday – During the Distribution we will sing hymn numbers 311 and 379.

Thanksgiving

Thank the Lord

In the Sacrament the Lord has blessed us with his greatest gifts. Now it is our privilege to thank him. The canticle “Thank the Lord” is based on several verses from Psalm 105. It encourages us to remember God’s gracious promises as we go back into the world. It urges us to bear witness to our renewed life in Christ by telling everyone what he has done. It leads us from the hour of worship to the mission of our everyday lives as the light and salt of the earth. All our activities flow from hearing the Word of God and from the faithful reception of the Lord’s body and blood.

We now join to sing “Thank the Lord.”

Prayer

The closing prayer summarizes what God has accomplished through the liturgy of the Word. It begs for God’s guidance through life to eternity. As the prayer ends, we sing a mighty “Amen.”

The pastor will now lead us in the closing prayer.

Blessing

Before leaving we are called brothers and sisters in Christ. That is the unique relationship that we cherish because of Christ. As brothers and sisters in Christ we will encourage each other, pray for each other, and support each other through the highs and lows of life.

After we have sensed the awesomeness of God in worship and after we have tasted and seen that the Lord is good, we are prepared to go in peace, to live in harmony with one another, and to serve the Lord with gladness. We entered his gates with thanksgiving. We go in peace and gladness.

The pastor will extend to us the favor of the Lord in the words of the Aaronic Blessing. In affirmation we sing a triple “Amen.”

Conclusion

The liturgy has ended. God has built us up and strengthened our faith through his Word. We return to our homes and to the world to live for Christ, to extend the good news of the gospel, and to anticipate joyously our eternity of worship in heaven.

We conclude our worship by singing verse three of hymn 263.