



Ask questions
using the QR code!

Understanding Worship: How God Makes Us Christian

CLASS 9: Liturgical Developments, Decay, and Recovery

c. 112, Pliny the Younger, letter to Trajan (northern modern Turkey)

They asserted, however, that the sum and substance of their fault or error had been that they were accustomed to meet on a fixed day before dawn and sing responsively a hymn to Christ as God, and to bind themselves by oath, not to do some crime, but not to commit fraud, theft, or adultery, not falsify their trust, nor to refuse to return a trust when called upon to do so. When this was over, it was their custom to depart and to assemble again to partake of food — but ordinary and innocent food.

AM gathering

Singing hymn

Oaths

PM gathering

Lord's Supper

1st-2nd century, *Didache/Teaching of the Apostles* (Syria, modern Syria/Jordan)

And concerning baptism...before the baptism . . . you shall order the one being baptized to fast for one or two days beforehand.

But every Lord's day gather yourselves together, and break bread, and give thanksgiving after having confessed your transgressions, that your sacrifice may be pure.

Now concerning the Thanksgiving (Eucharist), thus give thanks. First, concerning the cup And concerning the broken bread . . . But let no one eat or drink of your Thanksgiving (Eucharist), but they who have been baptized into the name of the Lord; for concerning this also the Lord has said, Give not that which is holy to the dogs.

After you are filled, thus give thanks: We thank You, holy Father to us you freely gave spiritual food and drink and life eternal through your Servant. Before all things we thank you that you are mighty; to you be the glory forever. . . . Hosanna to the Son of David! If anyone is holy, let him come; if anyone is not so, let him repent. Maranatha. Amen.

Confession of sin

Pre-communion prayer

Lord's Supper

Post-communion prayer of thanksgiving

2nd century, Justin Martyr's *First Apology* (Rome)

On the day called Sunday there is a meeting in one place of those who live in cities or the country, and the memoirs of the apostles or the writings of the prophets are read as long as time permits. When the reader has finished, the presider in a discourse urges and invites us to the imitation of these noble things. Then we all stand up together and offer prayers. . . . that we may be made worthy, having learned the truth, to be found in deed good citizens and keepers of what is commanded, so that we may be saved with eternal salvation. On finishing the prayers we greet each other with a kiss. . . .

And when we have finished the prayer, bread is brought, and wine and water, and the presider similarly sends up prayers and thanksgivings to the best of his ability, and the congregation assents, saying the "Amen." . . . When the presider has given thanks and the whole congregation has assented, those whom we call deacons give to each of those present a portion of the consecrated bread and wine and water, and they take it to the absent. This food we call Eucharist, of which no one is allowed to partake except one who believes that the things we teach are true, and has received the washing for forgiveness of sins and for rebirth, and who lives as Christ handed down to us. . . .

Those who prosper, and who so wish, contribute, each one as much as he chooses to. What is collected is deposited with the presider, and he takes care of orphans and widows, and those who are in want on account of sickness or any other cause, and those who are in bonds, and the strangers who are sojourners among us.

Scripture reading

Sermon

Prayer

Kiss of peace

Pre-communion prayer

Consecration of the elements

Lord's Supper

Tithes & Offerings

3rd century, *Apostolic Tradition*, Hippolytus (Rome)

Let catechumens spend three years as hearers of the word. But if a man is zealous and perseveres well in the work, it is not the time but his character that is decisive. When the teacher finishes his instruction, the catechumens shall pray by themselves, apart from the believers. . . .

They who are to be set apart for baptism shall be chosen after their lives have been examined: whether they have lived soberly, whether they have honored the widows, whether they have visited the sick, whether they have been active in well-doing. When their sponsors have testified that they have done these things, then let them hear the Gospel. . . . Then those who are set apart for baptism shall be instructed to bathe and free themselves from impurity and wash themselves on

Thursday. . . . shall fast on Friday, and on Saturday the bishop shall assemble them and command them to kneel in prayer. And, laying his hand upon them, he shall exorcise all evil spirits to flee away and never to return; when he has done this he shall breathe in their faces, seal their foreheads, ears and noses, and then raise them up. They shall spend all that night in vigil, listening to reading and instruction.

At cockcrow prayer shall be made over the water. The stream shall flow through the baptismal tank or pour into it from above when there is no scarcity of water; but if there is a scarcity, whether constant or sudden, then use whatever water you can find. They shall remove their clothing. And first baptize the little ones; if they can speak for themselves, they shall do so; if not, their parents or other relatives shall speak for them. Then baptize the men, and last of all the women; they must first loosen their hair and put aside any gold or silver ornaments that they were wearing: let no one take any alien thing down to the water with them.

At the hour set for the baptism the bishop shall give thanks over oil and put it into a vessel: this is called the “oil of thanksgiving”. And he shall take other oil and exorcise it: this is called “the oil of exorcism”. A deacon shall bring the oil of exorcism, and shall stand at the presbyter’s left hand; and another deacon shall take the oil of thanksgiving, and shall stand at the presbyter’s right hand. Then the presbyter, taking hold of each of those about to be baptized, shall command him to renounce, saying: “I renounce thee, Satan, and all thy servants and all thy works.”

And when he has renounced all these, the presbyter shall anoint him with the oil of exorcism, saying: “Let all spirits depart far from thee.” Then, after these things, let him give him over to the presbyter who baptizes, and let the candidates stand in the water, naked, a deacon going with them likewise. And when he who is being baptized goes down into the water, he who baptizes him, putting his hand on him, shall say thus: “Do you believe in God, the Father Almighty?” And he who is being baptized shall say: “I believe.”

Then holding his hand placed on his head, he shall baptize him once. And then he shall say: “Do you believe in Christ Jesus, the Son of God, who was born of the Holy Ghost of the Virgin Mary, and was crucified under Pontius Pilate, and was dead and buried, and rose again the third day, alive from the dead, and ascended into heaven, and sat at the right hand of the Father, and will come to judge the quick and the dead?” And when he says: “I believe,” he is baptized again. And again he shall say: “Do you believe in [the] Holy Ghost, and the holy church, and the resurrection of the flesh?” He who is being baptized shall say accordingly: “I believe,” and so he is baptized a third time. And afterward, when he has come up [out of the water], he is anointed by the presbyter with the oil of thanksgiving, the presbyter saying: “I anoint thee with holy oil in the name of Jesus Christ. And so each one, after drying himself, is immediately clothed, and then is brought into the church. Then the bishop, laying his hand upon them, shall pray, saying: “O Lord God, who hast made them worthy to obtain remission of sins through the laver of regeneration of the Holy Spirit, send into them thy grace, that they may serve thee according to thy will; for thine is the glory, to the Father and the Son, with Holy Spirit in the holy church, both now and world without end. Amen.”

4th century, *Apostolic Constitutions* (Antioch, modern Turkey)

Four scripture readings (Law, Prophets, Epistles, Gospels)
Singing between the readings
Sermon

6th century

COMPARISON OF BYZANTINE RITE AND ROMAN RITE

BYZANTINE RITE	ROMAN RITE
Prothesis (preparation of the bread and wine)	Introit psalm
Entrance with <i>Trisagion</i>	Greeting
	<i>Kyries</i>
	<i>Gloria in Excelsis</i>
	Collect (opening prayer)
Epistle reading	Epistle reading
Gospel reading	Alleluia (gradual)
	Gospel reading
	Dismissal of catechumens
Homily	Homily
Litany	Intercessions (disappearing)
Dismissal of catechumens	
Prayer of the faithful	
	Kiss of peace (eventually moved)
Great entrance (of bread and wine)	Offertory psalm (bread and wine presented)
	Prayer over the gifts
Kiss of peace	
Anaphora ("St. Basil" or "St. John Chrysostom")	Eucharistic prayer ("Roman Canon")
Lord's Prayer	Lord's Prayer
Elevation	
Fraction rite	Fraction rite
	<i>Agnus Dei</i> (added in seventh century)
Invitation to Communion ("Holy things for the holy")	
Communion	Communion with psalm
Litany and thanksgiving prayer	Post-Communion prayer
Dismissal	Dismissal

The decline of frequent lay Communion in the medieval West

A timeline from the Early Church through the Reformation

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Early Church

1st–5th centuries

Frequent lay communion expected

- Chrysostom, Augustine, and Cyril of Jerusalem all assume ordinary Christians receive Communion regularly.
- Chrysostom criticizes those who watch the Eucharist offered but don't approach the table.
- Attending the liturgy and receiving are essentially the same act — not yet separable.

②

Late Antiquity

6th–8th centuries

Reception starts becoming less frequent

- Rise of formal penitential books links reconciliation to worthiness to receive.
- Growing anxiety about receiving unworthily begins to suppress frequency.
- Devotion starts shifting toward reverence for the elements themselves.

③

Carolingian Era

9th–11th centuries

Attending Mass and receiving Communion split apart

- The Mass increasingly becomes something the laity watch rather than share in.
- Sharpening Real Presence theology deepens reverence — and hesitancy.
- The priest is understood as the primary liturgical actor.

④

High Middle Ages

12th–13th centuries

Annual communion becomes the legal minimum

- Lateran IV (1215), canon 21: confession and Communion required at least once a year, at Easter.
- Lateran IV also names transubstantiation officially; Trent (1551) defines it rigorously.
- Laity now receive bread only ("one kind"); rood screens separate clergy from congregation.
- Eucharistic adoration — elevation of the host, Corpus Christi processions — fills the gap left by infrequent reception.

⑤

Reformation

16th century

Push to restore frequent congregational communion

- Luther, Zwingli, and Calvin each reject transubstantiation, though in different ways.
- Calvin, dissatisfied with infrequent medieval practice, argues for frequent celebration and reception.
- Rood screens are torn down or opened as part of restoring lay participation and visibility.

16th century

Martin Luther's 1526 *German Mass*

Preferred a mixture of Latin and German; retained Latin for most of the liturgy, but sermon and hymns were in German

Emphasized congregation's participation, eliminating lengthy "priest-only" activities

Sermon center of the service

Denied doctrine of transubstantiation and distributed both bread and wine to laity

Martin Bucer's 1539 *Strasbourg Service*

Entire service was in German

Sermon center of the service

Minister and laity partake of communion at the same time

Liturgy became John Calvin's model in Geneva

Council of Trent (1545-63), Pope Pius V's *Quo primum* (1570), *Missale Romanum* (1570)

Defined the Mass as a true sacrifice, the actual, though bloodless, sacrifice of Christ that was propitiatory, appeasing God's wrath.

Affirmed that the Mass can be offered for the dead and those in Purgatory.

Mandated a standardized service be performed in Latin across all churches, banning local variants unless they could demonstrate the variant was over 200 years old.

1570 <i>Missale Romanum</i> , Tridentine Mass	1526, Martin Luther's German Mass	1539, Martin Bucer's Strasbourg Service
Sign of the Cross		
Psalm 42 ("Judica me, Deus")		
Confession of Sin/Absolution (Confiteor)		Confession of Sin/Absolution
Ascent to, kissing and incensing of the altar		
Introit (psalm verse + antiphon)	Hymn, congregational in German	Hymn or Psalm sung
Kyrie eleison	Kyrie eleison	
Gloria in excelsis Deo		Gloria in excelsis
Prayer	Prayer	Prayer
Epistle reading	Epistle reading	Scripture reading
Gradual and Alleluia	Hymn, congregational in German	Psalm sung
Gospel reading	Gospel reading	Scripture reading
Homily (optional)	Sermon	Sermon
Nicene Creed	Nicene Creed	Apostles' Creed
Offertory antiphon		
Offering of the bread ("Suscipe, sancte Pater...")		
Preparatory prayer		
Offering of the chalice		
"In spiritu humilitatis" prayer		
"Veni, sanctificator" prayer		
Incensation of the offerings, altar, and people		
Lavabo (washing of the priest's hands)		
"Suscipe, sancta Trinitas" (offering to the Trinity)		
"Orate, fratres"		
Secret — the offertory's concluding prayer	The Lord's Prayer	Pastoral prayer, including for the living, and the Lord's Prayer
Preface	Exhortation	
Sanctus and Benedictus	(moved)	
Te igitur (intercession for the Church)		
Memento of the living		(moved)
Communicantes (union with the saints)		
"Hanc igitur" and "Quam oblationem" prayers		Exhortation

Words of institution	Words of institution	Words of institution
Unde et memores (Anamnesis)	Consecration of the elements	
"Supra quae" and "Supplices te rogamus" prayer		
Memento of the dead		
"Nobis quoque peccatoribus" and "Per quem haec omnia" prayers		
Pater Noster (Our Father)	(moved)	(moved)
Fraction of the host and commingling		
Agnus Dei		
Private preparatory prayers of the priest		
Priest's Communion (bread and wine)	Priest's Communion (bread and wine)	
Distribution of bread (only) to the faithful, if any	Distribution of bread and wine	Distribution of bread and wine
Communion antiphon	Sanctus and Benedictus, or Agnus Dei	Psalm sung
Purification of the sacred vessels		
Post-communion prayer	Thanksgiving prayer	Thanksgiving prayer
"Ite, missa est" and response		Dismissal
Silent Blessing prayer ("Placeat tibi")		
Benediction	Benediction	Benediction
Last Gospel (reading of John 1:1–14)		

Recommended reading:

Paul F. Bradshaw, "The Homogenization of Christian Liturgy: Ancient and Modern—Presidential Address" in *Studia Liturgica*, vol. 26, no. 1 (March 1996)

Paul F. Bradshaw, *The Search for the Origins of Christian Worship: Sources and Methods for the Study of Early Liturgy*, second edition (Oxford University Press, 2002)

Paul F. Bradshaw, *Reconstructing Early Christian Worship* (The Liturgical Press, 2010)

Jonathan Gibson and Mark Earney, *Reformation Worship: Liturgies from the Past for the Present* (New Growth Press, 2018)

L. Michael Morales, *Who Shall Ascend the Mountain of the Lord?: A Biblical Theology of the Book of Leviticus* (IVP Academic, 2015)

Hughes Oliphant Old, *Worship: Reformed According to Scripture*, second edition (Westminster John Knox Press, 2002)

Melanie C. Ross and Mark A. Lamport, ed., *Historical Foundations of Worship: Catholic, Orthodox, and Protestant Perspectives* (Baker Academic, 2022)

Bard Thompson, *Liturgies of the Western Church* (Fortress Press, 1980)