



The Liturgy of the Eucharist

“Those whom the LORD has ransomed will return and enter Zion singing.” Isaiah 35:10

Third Sunday in Advent

Last week we looked at how our nourishment in Christ in the liturgy of the Word leads us to the eucharistic table of the Lord. Today’s first reading from Isaiah speaks of the Lord who comes to save us. As Christians, we commemorate the saving death and resurrection of our Lord each time we celebrate Eucharist. On this Gaudete—“Rejoice!”—Sunday, we rejoice that Christ’s coming in the flesh is renewed in us

each time we take part in the Eucharist.

Preparation of Gifts and Altar The gifts are gathered and the altar is prepared. Usually there is a collection and a song happening during this time, while the ministers and altar servers prepare the vessels and altar for the Eucharist. But this time of the liturgy is not merely a transition point between the elements of Word and Eucharist. It is a time where we solemnly and yet with great joy recall Christ’s total gift of himself for the salvation of the world. We do so in remembering that everything we have and all that we are is first a gift from God. Just as Christ did not hold onto his own human life and gave it away for us, so too in the Eucharist do we return all we have received to God.

We as the assembly gather and bring forth gifts of simple bread and wine, along with our gifts to help the poor and the Church. All this we try to do with an interior attitude of returning our lives to God. That interior attitude is made visible by the gifts we present. In this way, we also present our individual lives and our community of faith before God, that together we might be molded into a closer image of the Body of Christ.

Eucharistic Prayer The Eucharistic Prayer is the center and summit of the Mass, and is another moment in which we as a Church retell our salvation history. When the priest invites us into the prayer with the words, “Lift up your hearts,” we, prepared as gifts in the preparation of gifts and altar, can joyfully respond, “We lift them up to the Lord.” The Eucharistic Prayer is comprised of the preface dialogue and preface, the Holy, Holy or Sanctus, the text of the prayer itself, the memorial acclamation of the assembly, and the great Amen. All of this forms the Church’s *anamnesis*, a Greek word for remembering and making present again. Even though the priest says most of the words, he does so as one of and on behalf of the entire assembly, the Church. Thinking to ourselves, “Amen!” after each phrase of the Eucharistic prayer can remind us of that. Then, at the end of the Eucharistic Prayer, we the assembly voice our faith in the saving works of God and the paschal sacrifice of Christ through the sung, repeated, “Amen!”

Communion Rite Having claimed our faith in Christ’s saving death and resurrection and in his abiding presence in the sacrament of the Eucharist, we move now to receive Christ’s body and blood in procession with our brothers and sisters in Christ. First we pray the words Jesus gave us, then we exchange a ritual sign of peace, and then the consecrated bread is broken, and the Body and Blood of Christ, under the appearance of ordinary bread and wine, are poured out just as Christ the Lamb of God was broken for the life of the world. Then we come in procession to “taste and see the goodness of the Lord” (Psalm 34), singing as we process together as one body, one Spirit in Christ.

Transformed by Christ “Become what you receive, receive what you are.” St. Augustine’s words speak of the mystery of the Body of Christ (the gathered assembly) receiving the Body and Blood of Christ (in the sacramental bread and wine) in the Eucharist. As we will consider in more detail next week, we are sent forth from this assembly and experience of Christ to be the presence of Christ in our daily lives. What transformation will the Eucharist help us to work this week? How has Christ transformed us through this week’s experience at the Lord’s table?

Next week, the series continues with the Concluding Rites.

