

A Commentary on the Service for the Lord's Day

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Supplemental Liturgical Resources 1.*

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The Lord's Day

From its beginning, the Christian community has gathered on the first day of the week to hear the Scriptures read and proclaimed and to celebrate the Lord's Supper. The first day has special significance, since it marks the day Christ rose from the grave.

For early Christians, the resurrection of Jesus Christ was an event to remember and celebrate. The resurrection authenticated Jesus' ministry, defeated the power of death, and gave assurance of eternal life. Recognizing the importance of the resurrection, the New Testament community called the day of the week on which Christ rose "the Lord's day" (Rev. 1:10). It was the day to celebrate the resurrection.

The Lord's Day, the first day of the week, is therefore the very pivot of the church's calendar. In the ancient story of Creation, this day marked the beginning of creation. On the first day, God spoke light into being, separating light from darkness. In Christ's resurrection, Christians saw the beginning of the "new creation" and came to regard the day of resurrection as "the eighth day of creation." The Lord's Day is therefore a sign of God's kingdom and of hope.

ASSEMBLE IN GOD'S NAME

Worship begins with God. God takes the initiative and calls us into being. In the name of Christ we heed God's call and assemble as the community of faith.

We entered this community through Baptism. The Baptism we share in common binds us together. As we assemble about the Lord's table, all that Baptism means is renewed.

Call to Worship: A greeting from the New Testament reminds us of the One who calls us and in whose name we are assembled. Sentences from Scripture telling of God's grace remind us that worship centers on God and not on ourselves.

Praise and Adoration: Adoration is the keynote of all true worship, of the creature before the Creator, of the redeemed before the Redeemer. In song and prayer, God is praised.

Confession of Sin: Before God's majesty and holiness we become painfully aware of our selfishness and disobedience. We repent of our sin and ask God's forgiveness. We cannot earn God's forgiveness by our repentance. Nor can we ever be worthy of God's mercy. It is only in the assurance of God's prior mercy given freely to the undeserving that we dare make our humble confession before God.

Confession of sin therefore takes us back to our baptism. In the waters of Baptism, washed in the name of the triune God, we receive God's assurance of forgiveness and cleansing. Claiming the promises of God sealed in our baptism, we boldly confess our sin and accept forgiveness. We are confident that in our dying to sin and old destructive ways, the God of boundless grace raises us to new life.

The minister declares the reality of God's forgiving mercy to all who earnestly repent and turn to God. With joy we praise God, whose gift of grace brings the joy of forgiveness.

The Peace: In giving signs of peace to each other we express the reconciliation, unity, and love that are in Christ. The peace is a sign of the blessing and presence of God, a sharing of the peace that comes only from God. It is a glad demonstration that as God's people we are seeking to abide in the peace of God. It expresses an openness to the power of God's love to heal our brokenness and make us agents of that love in the world.

PROCLAIM GOD'S WORD

Gathered in God's name, we now open ourselves to God's life-giving Word, which comes to us through Scripture.

Readings from Scripture: We first pray that the Holy Spirit may illumine our hearts and minds so that we may hear aright and be prepared to accept God's Word for us. Readings from both the Old and the New Testament ensure that the unity and completeness of God's revelation are proclaimed. The singing of the psalm for the day (normally after the first reading) links the readings from Old and New Testaments. Coming to us from the worship of ancient Judaism, the psalms have been at the heart of Christian prayer and praise across the centuries.

The Sermon: The God who speaks in Scripture speaks to us now. The God who acted in biblical history acts today. Rooted in Scripture, faithful preaching

confronts us with the liberating Word and witnesses to God's continuing activity among us and in the life of the world.

Response to the Word: The proclamation of God's Word in readings from scripture and sermon invites a response of faith. We respond in song, confession of faith, prayer, and offering.

A hymn is sung. The hymn may be related to the theme of the day or lead to the prayer, or to a baptism or an ordinance that might follow.

We express our faith by a creed. The Nicene Creed and the Apostles' Creed express the faith tradition of the whole church, the faith into which we were baptized. The creed is our "pledge of allegiance," a reaffirmation of our desire to live and die in the faith. The creed thus renews the profession of faith made in our baptism.

Baptism, commissioning (confirmation), reception of members, or an ordinance of the church follows the proclamation as the obedient response binding us to the fellowship of the church.

Prayers of Intercession: In response to God's Word we offer our intercessions. Across the ages the church in its worship has prayed for the church universal, the world, all in authority, and those in distress or need. At no other time in its worship is the community of faith more conscious of the needs of the life of the world. We pray for the world because God loves the world. God created it and cares for it. God sent Jesus, who died for it. God is working to lead it toward the future God has for it. To abide in God's love is to share God's concern for the world. Our prayers should therefore be as wide as God's love and as specific as God's tender compassion for the least ones among us.

An Offering: Having prayed for the world, we put ourselves where our prayers are. In grateful response for the abundance of God's grace, we offer ourselves to be instruments of God's peace, love, and justice. As stewards we give from what God has given us, acknowledging that the world is not ours but God's.

GIVE THANKS TO GOD

From New Testament times the celebration of the Lord's Supper on each Lord's Day has been the norm of Christian worship. Nevertheless, most Protestant congregations are not yet able to celebrate weekly. The structure of this order is therefore designed to accommodate those Sundays when the Eucharist is not included. When the Sacrament is not celebrated, all components of the order for worship are included and follow the same sequence as on sacramental occasions. Only that which pertains exclusively to the Sacrament is deleted. The parallel structure thus reminds us that the norm of all Lord's Day worship is a service in which the Scriptures are read and interpreted and the Lord's Supper is celebrated.

Preparation of the Table: If the Eucharist is to be celebrated, the minister and elders take the bread and wine and prepare the table.

Holy Communion was given us by Christ himself. Before church governments were devised, before creeds were formalized, even before the first word of the New Testament was written, the Lord's Supper was firmly fixed at the heart of Christian faith and life. From the church's inception, Lord's Day and Lord's Supper were joined. Worship on each Lord's Day was a service of Word and Sacrament.

With bread and wine, in words and actions, the promises of God are made visible and concrete. The Word we have heard read and preached is now confirmed, for all that the life, death, and resurrection of Christ means is focused in this Sacrament.

Invitation to the Table: Through the waters of baptism, we are born into Christ's family. That family is nourished and sustained at this table. Therefore, all who are baptized and being nurtured in the faith of Jesus Christ are invited to come to this table. We are invited to come, humbly trusting God's mercy; rejoicing in all God has done for us. Though we are baptized but once, the Eucharist renews everything for which our baptism was the sign and seal.

The Lord's Supper is more than a recalling of events of long ago. In the Sacrament we participate now in all that God's coming in Christ means. The power and presence of Christ is a reality in this gathering at his table. We are joined anew to him who is the source of life.

The Great Prayer of Thanksgiving: The table having been set, the minister prays the blessing, giving thanks over the bread and wine. In joyful expectation, we join first in a dialogue which Christians have used for centuries when gathering at the Lord's table.

As the people of God, we praise God for all God's mighty acts in past, present, and future, in the manner of the Jewish blessings from which the prayer derives. We praise God for creating all things, for establishing the covenant, for giving the law and sending prophets, for showing boundless love and mercy, and for the particular act of God that is being celebrated.

Then in one voice, with choirs of angels and with the faithful of every time and place, we adore the triune God. The "Holy, holy, holy Lord," the song of the heavenly hosts, eternally being sung before God's majesty (Isa. 6:1-5; Rev. 4:8), is joined with the chants of praise that greeted Jesus' entry into Jerusalem (Ps. 118:26; Matt. 21:9).

As the great thanksgiving continues, we rejoice most especially in God's coming to us in Jesus Christ, who lived, suffered, and died for us, rose from the grave, and will come again to claim his kingdom. In remembering the words and actions of Jesus in the upper room, we are assured of the fulfillment of his

promise to be among us in the eating and drinking of this bread and wine. And so we joyfully acclaim Christ who died, is risen, and will come again.

The Holy Spirit is then invoked, to the end that this celebration may be for us all that Christ wills this Sacrament to be. We pray that the life-giving Spirit may renew in us all of the benefits of Christ's redemption, rekindle among us the united we have in Christ, empower us to do Christ's work in the world, and lead us to the glory of God's eternal kingdom. The prayer concludes in a climax of praise to the triune God. Together we shout the great "Amen!"

On Sundays when the Lord's Supper is not celebrated, a nonsacramental prayer of thanksgiving, similar in structure, is prayed.

The Lord's Prayer: Made one in Christ, we now pray the family prayer of the people of God.

Breaking of the Bread: The bread is broken for serving. The apostle Paul saw in the sharing of one loaf and one cup a symbol of our oneness in Christ.

Communion of the People: We come to the table of the Lord trusting in God's love and mercy, confident that in eating this bread and drinking this cup we abide in Christ and he in us.

Holy Communion is both a personal and a communal experience. The Sacrament is for each person, but we gather at the Lord's table not simply as individuals. We come to the table as members together of God's family, the body of Christ, the church. The Lord's Supper is the family meal of the people of God.

In the Eucharist, not only do we participate in the salvation events from the past, but we participate in God's future as well. This Sacrament is a glad resurrection feast, an anticipation of the great Banquet of the New Age, of the coming of the kingdom of God. We see what we ought to be, the holy community, the pledge of creation's destiny, the world as God wills it. We are thus given a foretaste of the goal of all the ages, when every creature of heaven and earth will acclaim Jesus Christ as Lord.

GO IN GOD'S NAME

The God who calls us together in worship now sends us forth in service.

Praise: We praise God for Christ's presence with us in Word and Sacrament, and we claim the strength and guidance of the Holy Spirit as we move out in ministry.

Charge: We are commissioned to obedient and grateful ministry as God's agents to heal life's brokenness. By the power of the Spirit let us be what Christ has redeemed us to be.

Blessing: The blessing of the triune God is given. Assured of God's peace and blessing, we are confident that God goes with us to our tasks.