

5TH IN A SERIES OF ANCIENT
LITURGIES

A EUCHARISTIC RITE OF THE 14TH CENTURY

A MEDIEVAL
ENGLISH BISHOP IN
FULL EUCHARISTIC
REGALIA
CA. 1380



THE CORPUS CHRISTI MASS
AS INTRODUCED AND USED IN THE 14TH
CENTURY IN YORK, ENGLAND.

PRE-SERVICE COMMENTS:

In previous services we've tried to be as authentic as we could to the experience of these early liturgies. Today, however, it won't be possible to do that. The Corpus Christi Mass was a solemn, celebratory, festive, major deal of a service that needed lots of acolytes, a large choir, musicians, incense, fancy vestments, bells, and such. We aren't set up for that.

What we'll do today is give as much of a sample of that liturgy as we can. We'll have a couple instances of Latin, we'll use a sanctus bell a couple of times, and we'll use some music from our hymnal that was typical of medieval times. Our music director will accompany our hymns and service music and we ask that you give a good effort to singing the plainsong settings of the Gloria in Excelsis and the Agnus Dei, as well as the hymns. All will be marked and numbered in the service leaflet.

We'll use italics to provide any necessary directions for the congregation and to make note of the actions that would have been happening at the original Corpus Christi celebration.

Take a minute now to look at Hymn 4 in the blue hymnal, which will be our opening hymn.

(we open the service by singing Hymn 4)

There were clouds of incense, there were ornate and splendid vestments, there were processions, there were excursions from behind the rood screen to display the Body of Christ, and much of the liturgy had been set to music and was performed by the choir. The music was still the ancient plainsong. As yet, harmony had not been developed, so there was no singing in parts.

The mentality of the time was vastly different from our own. Heaven, hell, and the after-life were very tangible to these folk. The promise of a heavenly life to people, who lived in uncertainty, in a cloud of dangers, in harsh circumstances, in constant struggle, often in pain, and subject to the whims of power; was a powerful tool for the Church. And, the Church didn't hesitate to use it. Popes might "excommunicate" whole nations if they strayed from the faith or the order of the Church. Such actions would, at the time, terrify the whole populace with the prospect of the loss of a heavenly life.

This was between two and three hundred years before the Reformation, which changed the face of Christianity worldwide. Today there are still Christians with a medieval mentality along with a whole panoply of beliefs and organizations both wonderful and weird, that style themselves Christian.

Somehow, in the midst of the shattering of Christianity, its huge ups and deep downs, its saintliness and its brutality, its scholarship and its ignorance; abides the still, small voice. For enough Christians over the broad spectrum of faith and practice there is still the experience of the God of love manifested in the life of Jesus. We hope that these liturgies will point you to that love and inspire you to its practice.

COMMENTARY ON TODAY'S LITURGY

The Corpus Christi Mass was introduced in England in the 14th century. By that time there had been many changes that had taken place in the liturgy's performance and in the laity's participation in the previous several centuries.

Corpus Christi is the celebration of the "real presence" of Jesus in the sacrament. By the Middle Ages the mystery and miracle of bread and wine becoming Jesus flesh had become the major focus of Christian devotion. In accordance with that change in focus the laity then rarely received communion (only on high feast days like Easter) and the consecrated bread was reverently exposed and displayed to the congregation for their awe and veneration.

The actual prayers of consecration were said (in Latin) by the clergy normally behind a screen that separated the crowd of lay people in the nave from the altar and the sanctuary. The western Church had become "priest-centered" with lay-people being mostly observers. The mass said in Latin, the illiteracy of most laity, the emphasis on mystery and miracle all conspired to elevate the clergy in the public mind.

While the clergy "said mass", there was music performed for the laity by choir and musicians, or special devotions offered that connected the liturgy to the Crucifixion . . . again stirring the minds and imaginations of the gathered lay-folk to an emotional response to Jesus' passion as it is re-enacted in the eucharistic celebration.

The people were bidden to pay attention, and given instructions as to when to kneel, stand, or sit. The people's own devotions followed the structure of the liturgy, and the most common congregational responses were the "Our Father", the "Hail Mary", and the Gloria in excelsis.

With so much of the ritual in Latin and out of sight, the space for the people's attention was replaced by ceremonial.

THE PREPARATION

O God, when you have turned again, you will quicken us.

And your people shall rejoice in you.

Show us your mercy, O Lord.

And grant us your salvation.

Let your priests be clothed in righteousness.

And let your saints rejoice.

Turn us again, O God of hosts.

Show the light of your countenance and we shall be whole.

Lord, hear my prayer.

And let my cry come to you.

The Lord be with you. (*Dominus vobiscum*)

And with your spirit. (*Et cum spiritu tuo*)

Let us pray. (*Oremus*)

Aufer a nobis, Domine, iniquitates nostras, ut ad sancta sanctorum mereamur puris mentibus introire. Per Dominum nostrum, qui vivit et regnat in saeculum saeculorum. **Amen.**

Take away from us, O Lord, our iniquities, that with pure minds, we may be worthy to enter into the holy of holies; through Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns forever and ever. **Amen.**

Glorify to the Father, and to the Son, and to the Holy Spirit, as it was in the beginning, is now, and will be forever. Amen.

(at this point, the altar would be censed by the priest)

The Gloria in Excelsis, Hymnal S-272

Dominus vobiscu.

Et cum spiritu tuo.

(here the priest turns back to the altar, and says

Oremus.

God our Father, whose Son our Lord Jesus Christ,
in a wonderful sacrament has left us a memorial of his
passion: Grant us so to venerate the sacred mysteries of his
Body and Blood that we may ever perceive within ourselves
the fruit of his redemption: who lives and reigns with you
and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. **Amen.**

A reading from the first letter of Paul
to the church in Corinth

For I received from the Lord what I also handed on to you,
that the Lord Jesus on the night when he was betrayed took a
loaf of bread, and when he had given thanks, he broke it and
said, 'This is my body that is for you. Do this in remembrance
of me.' In the same way he took the cup also, after supper,
saying, 'This cup is the new covenant in my blood. Do this, as
often as you drink it, in remembrance of me.' For as often as
you eat this bread and drink the cup, you proclaim the Lord's
death until he comes.

The Word of the Lord. **Thanks be to God.**

*(we sing the Gradual or "gospel hymn, 320 in the blue
hymnal)*

(the Gospeler requests the blessing) Give your blessing, my Lord.

(and the priest responds)

The Lord open your mouth to read, and our ears to
understand the holy gospel of peace. In the name of the
Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost. Amen

(the Gospeler prays)

(The congregation comes forward to receive their communion. In the 14 century, we would only receive the consecrated bread, but tonight we'll follow our usual custom and receive in both kinds. After communion the altar is placed in order and the priest says

Let us pray.

Lord Jesus Christ, you give us your body and blood in the eucharist as a sign that even now we share in your life. May we come to possess it completely in the kingdom where you live for ever and ever.

Go, the mass is finished.

Blessed be the name of the Lord.

Now and forever.

Our help is in the name of the Lord.

Who has made heaven and earth.

May almighty God bless you, the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit.

(We close by singing Hymn 5 in the blue hymnal)

Give me, O Lord, speech, right and well-sounding, that my words may be pleasing to you; and for your name's sake may they lead all who hear them into everlasting life.

I am the living bread that came down from heaven. Whoever eats of this bread will live for ever; and the bread that I will give for the life of the world is my flesh.'

The Jews then disputed among themselves, saying, 'How can this man give us his flesh to eat?' So Jesus said to them, 'Very truly, I tell you, unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink his blood, you have no life in you. Those who eat my flesh and drink my blood have eternal life, and I will raise them up on the last day; for my flesh is true food and my blood is true drink. Those who eat my flesh and drink my blood abide in me, and I in them. Just as the living Father sent me, and I live because of the Father, so whoever eats me will live because of me. This is the bread that came down from heaven, not like that which your ancestors ate, and they died. But the one who eats this bread will live for ever.' He said these things while he was teaching in the synagogue at Capernaum.

(A homily or sermon)

(following the sermon, the celebrant begins the Creed in a loud voice)

I believe in one God,
**the Father, the Almighty, maker of heaven and earth,
of all that is, seen and unseen.**
**We believe in one Lord, Jesus Christ, the only Son of God,
eternally begotten of the Father, God from God, Light from
Light, true God from true God, begotten, not made,**

of one Being with the Father. Through him all things were made. For us and for our salvation he came down from heaven: by the power of the Holy Spirit he became incarnate from the Virgin Mary, and was made man. For our sake he was crucified under Pontius Pilate; he suffered death and was buried. On the third day he rose again in accordance with the Scriptures; he ascended into heaven and is seated at the right hand of the Father. He will come again in glory to judge the living and the dead, and his kingdom will have no end. We believe in the Holy Spirit, the Lord, the giver of life, who proceeds from the Father and the Son. With the Father and the Son he is worshiped and glorified. He has spoken through the Prophets. We believe in one holy catholic and apostolic Church. We acknowledge one baptism for the forgiveness of sins. We look for the resurrection of the dead, and the life of the world to come. Amen.

THE OFFERTORY

Let us with gladness present the offerings of our life and labor to the Lord.

(when the offerings of the people are received, the priest says . . .
Grant to your church, we beseech you O Lord, the gifts of unity and peace which are signified in a mystical way beneath the gifts we offer, through our Lord Jesus Christ your Son, who lives and reigns with you forever and ever.
Amen.

The Lord be with you. **And with your spirit.**
Lift up your hearts. **We lift them to the Lord.**
Let us give thanks unto our Lord God.
It is right to give God thanks and praise.

(we say together)

**Holy, holy, holy Lord, God of power and might,
heaven and earth are full of your glory.
Hosanna in the highest.
Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord.
Hosanna in the highest.**

Who on the day before he suffered took bread into his holy and most honored hands, and with his eyes raised up towards heaven, to you, O God, his Father Almighty, giving thanks to you, he blessed and broke and gave to his disciples saying "Take and eat this, for this is my body". In like manner after supper taking also this most excellent cup into his holy and most honored hands, and likewise giving thanks to you, he blessed and gave to his disciples, saying "Take and drink this, for this is the cup of my blood, of the new and everlasting covenant", a mystery of faith, which shall be shed for you and for many for the remission of sins.

Let us pray. Admonished by healthful precepts and informed by the divine instruction, we are bold to say:
Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your Name, your kingdom come, your will be done on earth as in heaven. Give us today our daily bread. Forgive us our sins as we forgive those who sin against us. Save us from the time of trial.
And deliver us from evil. Amen.

And may his peace be always with you.
And with your spirit.

(we sing together the Agnus Dei, S-157 in the blue hymnal)