

Worship In The Early Church - Outline

From Judaism to Christianity

1. Chaburah
2. Todah Sacrifice
3. Seder

Christian Liturgies of the First Century

1. The Synaxis (“Meeting”)

- (a) Greeting/Response
- (b) Readings (Old Testament, Psalm, New Testament, Gospel)
- (c) Homily by the Bishop
- (d) Dismissal of the Catechumens by the Deacon(s)
- (e) Intercessory Prayer
- (f) Dismissal

2. The Eucharist (“Thanksgiving”)

- (a) Greeting/Response
- (b) Kiss of Peace
- (c) Offertory
- (d) The Eucharistic Prayer by the Bishop
- (e) Communion
- (f) Dismissal

3. The Agape (“Love feast”)

- (a) Introductory Prayer and blessing of the food
- (b) Meal
- (c) Washing of hands
- (d) Lighting of Lamp, blessed by the bishop.
- (e) Psalms and Hymns
- (f) Bishop blesses the cup
- (g) Bishop gives thanks and distributes the bread

Ad Fontes!

Epistles - Ignatius of Antioch (AD 110)
First Apology - St. Justin Martyr (AD 155)
Apostolic Tradition - St. Hippolytus of Rome (AD 215)
Abridged Liturgy of St. James (4th/5th Century)
Mystagogical Lectures - St. Cyril of Jerusalem (4th Century)

Ad Fontes!

Epistles - Ignatius of Antioch (AD 110)

Epistle to the Smyrnaeans

[The heretics] abstain from the Eucharist and from prayer, because they do not confess the Eucharist to be the flesh of our Savior Jesus Christ, which suffered for our sins, and which the Father, in his goodness, raised up again.

See that you follow the bishop, even as Jesus Christ follows the Father. Follow the priests as you would follow the apostles. And reverence the deacons as you would reverence the command of God. Let no man do anything connected with the Church without the bishop. Let that be deemed a proper Eucharist which is administered either by the bishop or by one to whom he has entrusted it. Wherever the bishop shall appear, there let the assembly also be - just as, wherever Jesus Christ is, there is the Catholic Church. Apart from the bishop, it is not lawful to baptize or to celebrate an agape. But whatever he shall approve is pleasing to God, so that everything that is done may be secure and valid.

Epistle to the Ephesians

I consider you happy who are so joined to [your bishop] as the Church is to Jesus Christ, and as Jesus Christ is to the Father, that so all things may agree in unity! Let no man deceive himself: if any one be not within the altar, he is deprived of the bread of God. For if the prayer of one or two possess such power, how much more that of the bishop and the whole Church! He, therefore who does not assemble with the Church, has thus manifested his pride and condemned himself.

First Apology - St. Justin Martyr (AD 155)

The Eucharist (Chapter 66)

This food we call Eukaristia [the Eucharist], and no one is allowed to partake but he who believes that our doctrines are true, who has been washed with the washing for the remission of sins and rebirth, and who is living as Christ has enjoined.

We do not receive these as common bread and drink. For Jesus Christ our Saviour, made flesh by the Word of God, had both flesh and blood for our salvation. Likewise, we have been taught that the food blessed by the prayer...is the flesh and blood of Jesus who was made flesh.

The apostles, in the memoires they composed called "Gospels", have passed on to us what was enjoined upon them; that Jesus took bread, and when He had given thanks, said, "Do this in memory of Me. This is My body". In the same way, after taking the cup and giving thanks, He said "This is My blood"...

Sunday Mass in Rome (Chapter 67)

And on the day called "Sunday", all who live in cities or in the countryside gather together in one place, and the memoirs of the apostles or the writings of the prophets are read, as long as time permits. Then, when the reader has finished, the president instructs and exhorts them to the imitation of these good things. Then we all rise together and pray, and, as we said before, when our prayer is ended, bread and wine with water are brought forth, and the president in like manner offers prayers and thanksgivings, according to his ability. The people assent, saying "Amen"; and there is a distribution to each of the eucharistic elements. The deacons carry a portion to those who are absent.

Those who are able, give willingly whatever sum they think appropriate. The money collected is deposited with the president. He gives it, then, to comfort orphans, widows, and those who are wanting, through sickness or any other cause, and those who are imprisoned, and strangers travelling among us. In a word, he takes care of all who are in need.

We hold our assembly on Sunday because it is the first day, on which God brought forth the world from darkness and matter. On the same day, Jesus Christ our Saviour rose from the dead. For He was crucified on the day before Saturn's day; and on the day of the Sun he appeared to His apostles and disciples and taught them these things, which we have submitted to you for your consideration.

Apostolic Tradition - St. Hippolytus of Rome (AD 215)

Bishop: The Lord be with you.

All: And with your spirit.

Bishop: Lift up your hearts.

All: We lift them up to the Lord.

Bishop: Let us give thanks to the Lord.

All: It is proper and right.

Bishop: We give you thanks, O God, through your beloved Child Jesus Christ, whom you have sent to us in these last days as Saviour, Redeemer, and Messenger of your counsel. He is your Word, inseparable from you, through whom you created all things and in whom you are well pleased.

From heaven you sent Him into the womb of the Virgin, and, once conceived within her, He was made flesh, and was shown to be your Son, born of the Holy Spirit and the Virgin. Fulfilling your will and winning for you a holy people He stretched out his hands as he suffered, that by His death He might free those who believed in you.

When He was betrayed to his willing death, so that He might abolish death, break the bonds of the devil, trample hell underfoot, give light to the righteous, set a term of sentence, and manifest his resurrection, He took bread and, giving thanks to you, said: "Take, eat: This is my body, which is broken for you." In the same way, the cup, saying: "This is my blood, which is shed for you. When you do this, do so in memory of me." And so, keeping in mind His death and resurrection, we offer you the bread and the cup, giving thanks because you have counted us worthy to stand before you and serve you.

We pray that you would send your Holy Spirit upon the offerings of your holy Church. Gathering them together, grant that all your saints who partake may be filled with the Holy Spirit... that we may praise you and give you glory, through your Child Jesus Christ, through whom be glory and honour, with the Holy Spirit in the holy Church, now and forever. Amen.

Abridged Liturgy of St. James (4th/5th Century)

Petitions

Priest: Peace be with you.

People: And with your spirit.

Priest: The Lord bless us all, and sanctify us for the celebration of the divine and pure mysteries.
Amen.

Deacon: In peace let us pray to the Lord. For the peace from on high, and for God's love to man, and for the salvation of our souls, let us pray to the Lord. For peace in the whole world, for the unity of all the holy churches of God, let us pray to the Lord. For the remission of our sins, and forgiveness of our transgressions, and for our deliverance from all tribulation, wrath, and distress let us pray to the Lord.

Singers: Holy God, holy mighty, holy immortal, have mercy upon us.

Priest: O compassionate and merciful, patient, gracious, and true God, hear us. Deliver us from every temptation of the devil and man. For we are unable to overcome what is opposed to us. But you are able, Lord, to save us. Because you are holy we send up the praise and the thrice-holy hymn to you, the Father, Son and Holy Spirit, now and forever, and for all eternity.

People: Amen.

Priest: Peace be with you.

People: And with your spirit.

Singers: Alleluia.

[The liturgy proceeds with readings from the Old and New Testaments]

Dismissal of the Unbaptized

Priest: O God, you have taught us your divine and saving oracles. Enlighten the souls of us sinners for the comprehension of the things that have been spoken here. May we be not only hearers of spiritual things, but also doers of good deeds. In Christ Jesus our Lord, with whom you are blessed, together with your all-holy, good, and life-giving Spirit, now and always, and forever.

People: Amen.

Priest: Peace be with you.

People: And with your spirit.

Deacon: Let none of the catechumens remain, none of the unbaptized, none of those who are unable to join with us in prayer. Look at one another. The doors! The doors! Be attentive, and let us again pray to the Lord.

[The catechumens leave]

Priest: Sovereign Almighty, King of Glory, show yourself to us who call upon you at this holy hour, and redeem us from the shame of our transgressions. Cleanse our minds and thoughts from impure desires and accept from the hands of us sinners this incense, as you once accepted the offering of Abel, and Noah, and Aaron, and Samuel, and of all your saints...

Singers: Let all mortal flesh be silent, and stand with fear and trembling, and meditate nothing earthly within itself. For the King of kings and Lord of lords, Christ our God, comes forward to be sacrificed, and to be given for food to the faithful. And the bands of angels go before him with every power and dominion, the many-eyed cherubim, and the six-winged seraphim, covering their faces, and crying aloud the hymn: Alleluia, Alleluia, Alleluia.

The Eucharistic Prayer

Priest: The love of the Father, the grace of the Son, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with us all.

People: And with your spirit

Priest: Let us lift up our minds and our hearts.

People: It is proper and right.

Priest: It is indeed becoming and right to praise you, to sing of you, to bless you, to worship you, to glorify you. The highest heavens praise you, the sun, moon, stars, earth, sea, spirits of just men and of prophets; souls of martyrs and of apostles; angels, archangels, and the many-eyed cherubim, and the six-winged seraphim crying with unceasing praises: the victorious hymn of your majestic glory...

People: Holy, holy, holy, O Lord of hosts, 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.

Priest: Lord, you made man from earth after your own image and likeness; gave him the joy of paradise; and when he broke your commandment you did not desert him, but disciplined him as a merciful father would, called him by the law, instructed him by the prophets; and afterwards sent your only-begotten Son that by his coming he might renew and restore your image.

On the night he was betrayed, when he was about to endure his willing and life-giving death on the cross, the sinless one for sinners, he delivered himself up for the life and salvation of the world. Taking bread in his holy and pure hands, he lifted up his eyes to heaven, gave thanks and prayed. He broke the bread, gave it to us, his disciples and apostles, saying "Take, eat. This is my body, broken for you, and given for remission of sins"

People: Amen.

Priest: In the same way, after supper, he took the cup with mixed wine and water, and, lifting his eyes to heaven and presenting it to you, his God and Father, he gave thanks and prayed and blessed it. He filled it with the Holy Spirit, and gave it to us his disciples, saying, "Drink this, all of you; this is my blood of the new covenant, shed for you and many, and given for the remission of sins".

People: Amen

Priest: ...as often as you eat this bread and drink this cup, you proclaim the Lord's death and confess his resurrection until he comes again.

Deacon: We believe and confess.

People: We proclaim your death, O Lord, and confess your resurrection.

Rite of Communion

Priest: Count us worthy, O loving Lord, with sanctified lips, to dare to call upon you, the holy God and to say:

People: Our Father, who art in heaven: hallowed be thy name...

Priest: And lead us not into temptation Lord. For the kingdom, the power, and the glory are yours, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, now and forever.

People: Amen.

Priest: Peace be with you.

People: And with your spirit.

Deacon: Let us bow our heads to the Lord.

People: To you, O Lord...

Priest: ...Holy things for holy people!

People: One is holy, one Lord Jesus Christ, to the glory of God the Father, to whom be glory for all eternity.

Deacon: For the remission of our sins the return of the erring, the healing of the sick, the deliverance of the captives, those who have fallen asleep beforehand, let us all say fervently: Lord, have mercy.

People: Lord have mercy.

[The priest breaks the bread in half, and dips the half in his right hand in the chalice, saying...]

Priest: The union of the all-holy body and precious blood of our Lord and God and Saviour, Jesus Christ...Behold the Lamb of God...who takes away the sin of the world...

[And when he gives a single piece to each chalice...]

Deacon: Give the blessing.

Priest: O taste and see that the Lord is good; who is parted and not divided; distributed to the faithful and not expended; for the remission of sins, and life everlasting; now and always, and forever.

Deacon: In the peace of Christ let us sing.

Singers: O taste and see that the Lord is good.

Priest: O Lord our God, the heavenly bread, the life of the universe, I have sinned against heaven and before you, and I am not worthy to partake of your pure mysteries; but as a merciful God, make me worthy by your grace to partake of your holy body and precious blood, for the remission of sins, and life everlasting.

[Distributes to the clergy. The deacons take patens and chalices for distribution to the people]

Mystagogical Lectures - St. Cyril of Jerusalem (4th Century)

The Sign of Peace

The Deacon cries aloud *“Receive one another; and let us kiss one another”*. Do not think that this kiss is of the same character as those given in public by common friends. It is not. This kiss blends souls, one with another, and pledges mutual, wholehearted forgiveness. The kiss therefore is the sign that our souls are mingled together, as we banish all remembrance of wrongs. This is why Christ said *“If you are offering your gift at the altar, and there remember that your brother has anything against you, leave your gift upon the altar, first be reconciled to your brother, and then come and offer your gift”*.

Lift Up Your Hearts

After this, the Priest cries aloud *“Lift up your hearts”*. For truly, in that awesome hour, we should have our hearts on high with God, and not below, thinking of earthly things... the Priest bids all in that hour to dismiss all cares of this life... and to have their hearts in heaven with the merciful God.

Then you answer *“We lift them up unto the Lord”*, giving your agreement to what he has said. At all times God should be in our memory, but if this is impossible by reason of human weakness, in that hour above all this should be our earnest endeavour.

The Priest says *“Let us give thanks unto the Lord”*. For truly we are bound to give thanks, that He called us, unworthy as we were, to so great a grace; that He reconciled us when we were His foes... Then you say, *“It is proper and right”*: for in giving thanks we do something that is proper and just. He, for His part, exceeded mere justice in doing us good, and counting us worthy of such great benefits.

The Consecration

Then having sanctified ourselves by spiritual Hymns, we beseech the merciful God to send forth His Holy Spirit upon the gifts lying before Him; that He may make the Bread the Body of Christ, and the Wine the Blood of Christ; for whatsoever the Holy Spirit has touched, is surely sanctified and changed.

Then, after the spiritual sacrifice, the bloodless service, is completed... we entreat God for the common peace of the Churches, for the welfare of the world; for kings; for soldiers and allies; for the sick; for the afflicted; and, in a word, for all who stand in need of help we all pray and offer this sacrifice... Then we commemorate also those who have fallen asleep before us... believing that it will be a very great benefit to the souls, for whom prayer is raised during that holy and awesome sacrifice.

Communion

In approaching therefore, come not with your wrists extended, or your fingers spread; but make your left hand a throne for the right, as for that which is to receive a King. And having hollowed your palm, receive the body of Christ, saying over it, "Amen." So then, after having carefully hallowed your eyes by the touch of the holy body, partake of it; giving heed lest you lose any portion thereof; for whatever you lose, is evidently a loss to you as it were from one of your own members