

The Episcopal Church of Saints Andrew and Matthew Unfolding the Liturgy at SsAM – The Season of Pentecost

The overall shape of our liturgy is not unique to the Episcopal Church and traces its roots to the very early church (300-400 A.D.). Our worship experience at SsAM is unique and is intentional in how we balance church tradition and the world we live in today. Such is the case in our use of inclusive language and in the various forms of music in our liturgy.

OPENING COMMENTARY: Our liturgy – the “work of the people” – is not just the work of the priest; it is what we do together, when we maintain our bond with Jesus Christ and with each other. We are a community, not an audience. We stand together at the procession to remind us that we are all participants in the Eucharist...we will offer God our prayers and we will praise together as one community.

We gather to encounter God in the Word (the scripture readings, prayers) and sacrament (bread and wine) as signs of the presence and grace of Christ. There are two large parts to the liturgy – the Liturgy of the Word, based on ancient forms of synagogue worship, and the Liturgy of the Table, with the Eucharist (“thanksgiving”) or the Lord’s Supper. In this part of our liturgy, we follow Jesus’ actions at the Last Supper and call Him into our presence. In the Eucharist, we offer our thanks to God for the great gifts we have received. Our liturgy is taken from the *Book of Common Prayer* whose common words keep us connected to our traditions and allow us to actively participate and be more than just listeners. We are not a group of spectators watching a group of performers, but we are people of God acting together.

During our 10:30 liturgy, we begin with an Organ Voluntary. Our organ music, including the hymns, reflect the theme of the day or the season of the Church year. We hope you will listen to how the scriptures, prayers, and music fit together to enhance our expression of our relationship with God.

The Collect (prayer) for purity, based on Psalm 51, prepares us for entering the presence of God. Originally said privately by the priest, this preparation for worship has been said by the whole congregation since 1549. **The Gloria**, an ancient song of praise, allows us to glorify God and to communicate his peace to His people. You will hear the Kyrie (*Lord have mercy, Christ have mercy, Lord have mercy*) during Advent and Lent instead of the Gloria. The Collect of the Day focuses us on the themes to be found in the scriptures of the day.

The Celebrant formerly greets us with an ancient Jewish type of salutation, “*The Lord be with you*” through which we are calling God into our presence.

The reading of **Scripture** in public is rooted in the practices of the Jewish Synagogue and was adapted by the early Church. The fixed pattern of readings of scripture (from the lectionary) allow us to hear most of the Bible over a three year period. The **first reading** is traditionally from the Hebrew Bible and tells the story of God’s relationship with his chosen people of Israel, our spiritual ancestors. The **Psalms** are the ancient hymns of the Jews linking us to worship going back thousands of years. Including the Jewish scriptures reminds us that the roots of Christianity are in Judaism and that the God of the Jewish scriptures is the same God as in the Christian

scriptures. The **second reading** is often from one of the letters attributed to Paul, the apostle who helped found the early church, or from the Book of Acts .

The final reading is from one of the four **Gospels**, read by a member of the clergy, through which we hear the words and actions of Jesus Christ. In Year A - Matthew, Year B-Mark, Year C-Luke. John is read in each year during the major seasons of Christmas, Lent and Easter. The church year changes with Advent I. We are currently in year A.

The **Gospel Procession** reminds us that it is our responsibility to carry the Good News of Jesus Christ into all the world. We stand, as we are able, to listen to this reading. Some Episcopalians will trace a cross with their thumb over their forehead, lips and heart. This "enacted prayer" asks that the Gospel be inscribed in our minds, spoken with our lips and loved in our hearts.

Listening to the scripture, rather than reading them, opens you up to hearing the stories differently, no matter how many times you have heard them. We encourage you to put your service leaflet down and give it a try. We hope you will take the service leaflet with you so you can pray the prayers and read the scripture during the week.

The **sermon** (or homily if it is a shorter teaching) breaks open the readings and helps us explore their meaning and application in our daily lives.

The Creed (belief) or Affirmation expresses the faith of the whole Church. The Creed (in whatever form) affirms God as Trinity: Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

In the **prayers of the people**, we pray together for the Church, world leaders, ourselves, the ill and the departed. We, as part of the whole church, are united in prayer. There are several forms in the *Book of Common Prayer*, but Christina Lee composes our PoTP. Our lectors (readers) strive to *pray* the prayers and not just read them. You are encouraged to put the service leaflet down, to listen and to pray.

We exchange **the Peace** in the spirit of friendship and reconciliation and in the love of God. This is part of our preparation for the Holy Eucharist so we can approach God's table in love and charity with one another. It is a time for welcoming the stranger, for reconciliation and friendship, but is not a time to catch up with the latest news. Save that for coffee hour! Some consider the exchange of the Peace as the hinge between the Liturgy of the Word and the Liturgy of the Table. In the first part of the service, we have been re-made into new people; the Peace expresses this and then we are ready to go to the Table to celebrate the sacrament of communion. You will note that the Celebrant moves to the Table (altar), focusing us on the meal which we will share.

There are four actions in the Liturgy of the Table, each mirroring the Lord's actions at the Last Supper: Our Lord **took** bread and wine; He **gave** thanks; He **broke** the bread; and He **gave** the bread and wine to his disciples. During the Offertory, we take by gathering gifts (bread, wine, and monetary) and presenting them to God and the Church at the Altar.

The Celebrant's hands are outstretched and uplifted in the orans position during the Eucharistic Prayer. This is believed to be the most ancient form of prayer, the one that Jesus knew. Reflecting openness and acceptance towards God, it is not limited to priests! Give it a try. You may be surprised at the affect the position of your hands has on your spirit. You may notice that

some people kneel while others stand after the Sanctus. While standing is the more ancient posture of prayer, either is acceptable.

There are four primary “forms” for the Eucharistic Prayer, some are ancient (B,D), two are new (A, C) and D is drawn from the Eastern Orthodox tradition. Regardless of which form of the Eucharistic Prayer is used, it includes the invocation that God sends the Spirit to bless the bread and wine and make Christ truly present among us. It is through the prayers of all who are present (not just the Celebrant) and God’s blessings that the bread and wine become the body and blood of Christ. The prayer is offered on behalf of the entire congregation, whose members corporately are the celebrant (“On the night before he died for us...”)

The Lord’s Prayer, a prayer of community, is the only recorded prayer Jesus taught his disciples. It brings us back to the basics. We use either the traditional or the contemporary version in the service.

The Celebrant breaks the bread (the Fraction), reminding us of the Last Supper and that Christ’s body was broken on the Cross for us. Following The Eucharistic Prayer, the bread and wine are given as all are invited to come forward to receive the body and blood of Christ. The more ancient posture for receiving communion is standing, which also is symbolic of resurrection, but kneeling is acceptable. It is proper to receive the bread (wafer) in open hands and to take the chalice into your own hands. You may, if you wish, intinct the wafer into the wine. At SsAM, gluten free wafers are available at the center of the altar railing.

The ablutions (“cleaning up”) takes place once communion is administered to all. The consecrated wafers that remain are kept in the tabernacle for Pastoral visits. The candle located on the wall near the choir indicates that consecrated bread and or wine are in the tabernacle.

The Blessing has been a part of the service since the 4th century and takes different forms, depending on the church season.

If one is present, the Deacon dismisses us, sending us out to the world to do the work we are called to do. The dismissal should be proclaimed boldly followed by our declarative response, “*Thanks be to God.*” After Easter through the Day of Pentecost, “Alleluia, alleluia” may be added to any of the dismissals.