

SSPX Podcast

Early Christian Liturgies

What do we know from the New Testament and the Fathers? Up to Gregory the Great.

Ceremonial development : overview

Fr. Pius Innocentius Wapelhorst :

In the Jewish Passover Meal, a number of psalms were recited, including Psalms 116, 117, and 135. Psalm 117 bears a resemblance to the Preface and Sanctus—it is a psalm of praise and thanksgiving, and contains, toward the end, the clause *Benedictus qui venit in nomine Domini*. Psalm 135 (which, like Ps. 117, begins with *Confitemini Domino quoniam bonus...*) praises God for his intrinsic perfections, for creation, for the redemption of the people of Israel from captivity, for their introduction into the Promised Land, and for their deliverance from enemies, and was to the Jews a summary of Revelation, a rule or canon (κανών) of faith.

The ancient Christian Liturgy of the Mass followed the same order of thoughts (although centered around the spiritual redemption worked by Christ), sometimes using the same words as those of Psalm 135.

From the pontificate of Pope St. Damasus, the first part of the Canon, which contained this thanksgiving for creation, etc., was omitted, and other prayers, which used to be recited after the Consecration—the *Memento* for the living, the *Hanc igitur* and *Quam oblationem*—were moved to the front of the Canon.

Because of the original closeness between the Canon and its prototype (Ps. 135) the sacrifice of the Mass has from Apostolic times been called the Eucharist (εὐχαριστία) or “thanksgiving,” even as Psalm 135 is one long act of thanksgiving.

Fr. Bernard Allo, O.P.

L'ordre de la messe était donc définitivement constitué entre le IIe et le IIIe siècle : une e messe des catéchumènes », consacrée à des prières générales et à des instructions, plus ou moins imitée de la cérémonie des synagogues, au matin du sabbat; puis ceux qui n'étaient pas baptisés sortaient, on apportait les offrandes (offertoire), et la vraie messe, la reproduction de la dernière Cène, commençait. Après la communion, et une prière d'action de grâces terminée par la bénédiction du célébrant - c'est cette partie qui s'est le plus développée par la suite des temps -, les fidèles se dispersaient.

A cette époque primitive, toutes les liturgies eucharistiques étaient sensiblement les mêmes à travers la chrétienté. Mais quand l'Église jouit de la paix, à partir du IVe siècle, et attira en foule les anciens païens, les cérémonies s'enrichirent, pour répondre au goût des nouveaux convertis, de beaucoup de détails expressifs qui varièrent d'une région à l'autre.

Pourtant, malgré toutes les différences liturgiques qui allèrent augmentant, surtout entre l'Orient et l'Occident, c'est toujours la même messe remontant à l'âge apostolique, la reproduction de la Cène et du sacrifice de la Croix, l'acte sacré par excellence.

Fr. Juan-Carlos Iscara :

Uniform development of the Liturgy, until 4th century, was only approximate, never a complete identity of details.

- Written models of prayers already existed, but there was not yet an obligation to remain faithful to them.
- There was a variety of circumstances and needs to which the Liturgy had to adapt.
- It was difficult to maintain stable and constant communications between the Churches.

Churches of lesser importance, from the point of view of prestige, government and tradition, liked to copy the usages of other churches which enjoyed the leadership of gifted men, or a longer tradition, or some sort of political or moral hegemony. All existing rites within the Church can more or less be traced back to certain chief groups or “types” that took their origin from those ecclesiastical areas of influence.

- Antiochian type:

- East Syrian (Nestorian, Chaldean and Malabar)
- West Syrian (Syrian Jacobite, Maronite, Armenian and Byzantine)
- Alexandrian type:
 - Coptic (Egypt) and Abyssinian (Ethiopia).
- Gallican type:
 - Gallican (France)
 - Celtic (Irish and Scots)
 - Mozarabic (Spain)
 - Ambrosian (Milan)
- Roman type.

After the great christological controversies, the development of the theology of the Eucharist guided the development of the liturgy.

- In the East the Eucharist rapidly came to be performed with a degree of ceremonial splendor that the West achieved only much later...
- In the West ceremonial developed less swiftly. The classical Roman Mass of the 8th century, described in the Ordo Romanus primus, retains much of the simplicity of the early Eucharist.

JERUSALEM-ANTIOCH:

- Emanating from Antioch, which received much of its liturgical usage from Jerusalem, the West Syrian Liturgies predominate over all other Oriental Rites.
 - Evolution may be seen in: Apostolic Constitutions (4th cent.), Mystagogical Catechesis of St. Cyril of Jerusalem, the diary of Etheria's pilgrimage, and the homilies of St. John Chrysostom.
- The oldest complete formulary for the West Syrian Rite is the Greek Liturgy of St. James, dating from before the 7th cent.
 - Fallen into disuse from 12th century.

- Translated into Syriac and used by schismatic Monophysite sect of the Jacobites, some time after the Council of Chalcedon (451).
- Followed also by Syrians who returned to the Church in 1781 and by the Maronites, who have romanized it to a certain degree.
- The Liturgy of St. James was subsequently transformed by Sts. Basil and John Chrysostom and is known today as the Byzantine Rite.
 - It is the most widely used of all Oriental Liturgies. The Liturgy of St. John Chrysostom is practically of daily use, while the Liturgy of St. Basil is limited to a few days in the year.

Dom Jean de Puniet :

- All liturgies East and West agree in
 - Clear distinction between Mass of the Catechumens and Mass of the Faithful (Mass proper)
 - Mass of Catechumens consists in lessons, psalms, prayers, homily
 - Mass of the Faithful consists in Offertory, Eucharistic Prayer, Communion
- They differ in that
 - In the East, the diptychs are outside the Canon
 - In the West, the epiclesis is before and not after the Consecration
- We can conclude that the Roman Rite underwent some change before the 4th century but there is no evidence of substantial change after 400 and the Canon is essentially fixed from that date.

Ceremonial development : sources

Scripture

Acts of the Apostles

2:41 They therefore that received his word were baptized: and there were added in that day about three thousand souls.

2:42 And they were persevering in the doctrine of the apostles and in the communication of the breaking of bread and in prayers.

2:46 And continuing daily with one accord in the temple and breaking bread from house to house, they took their meat (i.e. food) with gladness and simplicity of heart...

- Wapelhorst : The rite of the breaking of the bread is of great importance, and is lacking in none of the Liturgies.
- (*ibid.*) At the beginning of the Passover meal, the bread was broken to signify the tribulations which the people of Israel endured in their captivity.
- (*ibid.*) ...Christ, having finished the prayer of thanksgiving (the conclusion of the Canon), broke the consecrated bread: 'He gave thanks, and broke' (Lk 22:19), most likely into two parts, to signify mystically his own death... then afterwards into many pieces, in order to give a particle to each Apostle.
- (*ibid.*) 'This is my Body, which shall be delivered up for you' (1 Cor 11:24)—the Greek text has κλώμενον: 'which is broken for you.'

1 Corinthians 10

10:16 The chalice of benediction which we bless, is it not the communion of the blood of Christ? And the bread which we break, is it not the partaking of the body of the Lord? ...

10:20 But the things which the heathens sacrifice, they sacrifice to devils and not to God...

10:21 You cannot drink the chalice of the Lord and the chalice of devils: you cannot be partakers of the table of the Lord and of the table of devils.

1 Corinthians 11

11:23 For I have received of the Lord that which also I delivered unto you, that the Lord Jesus, the same night in which he was betrayed, took bread,

11:24 And giving thanks, broke and said: Take ye and eat: This is my body, which shall be delivered for you. This do for the commemoration of me.

11:25 In like manner also the chalice, after he had supped, saying: This chalice is the new testament in my blood. This do ye, as often as you shall drink, for the commemoration of me.

11:26 For as often as you shall eat this bread and drink the chalice, you shall shew the death of the Lord, until he come.

11:27 Therefore, whosoever shall eat this bread, or drink the chalice of the Lord unworthily, shall be guilty of the body and of the blood of the Lord...

11:34 If any man be hungry, let him eat at home; that you come not together unto judgment. And the rest I will set in order, when I come.

1 Corinthians 14

14:5 ...greater is he that prophesieth than he that speaketh with tongues: unless perhaps he interpret, that the church may receive edification...

14:16 Else, if thou shalt bless with the spirit, how shall he that holdeth the place of the unlearned say, Amen, to thy blessing? Because he knoweth not what thou sayest.

- St. Thomas : But why are blessings not given in the vernacular, so that they will be understood by the people and conform themselves to them more? The answer is that this probably happened in the early Church, but later the faithful were instructed and know what they hear in the common office, where blessings are given in Latin.
- Dom Puniet : Or, il ne s'agit pas d'une prière quelconque, mais d'une action de grâces, εὐχαριστία, terme qui s'applique fort bien à la prière eucharistique...

14:17 For thou indeed givest thanks well: but the other is not edified...

14:27 If any speak with a tongue, let it be by two, or at the most by three, and in course: and let one interpret.

14:28 But if there be no interpreter, let him hold his peace in the church and speak to himself and to God...

14:34 Let women keep silence in the churches: for it is not permitted them to speak but to be subject, as also the law saith.

14:35 But if they would learn anything, let them ask their husbands at home. For it is a shame for a woman to speak in the church...

14:39 Wherefore, brethren, be zealous to prophesy: and forbid not to speak with tongues.

14:40 But let all things be done decently and according to order.

2 Corinthians 1

1:19 For the Son of God, Jesus Christ, who was preached among you by us, by me and Sylvanus and Timothy, was not: It is and It is not (yes and no, *ναὶ καὶ οὐ*). But, It is (yes, *ναὶ*), was in him.

1:20 For all the promises of God are in him, It is. Therefore also by him, [we say] amen to God, unto our glory (*δι' αὐτοῦ τὸ ἀμὴν τῷ θεῷ πρὸς δόξαν δι' ἡμῶν*—unto [*his*] glory *on our behalf*).

Didache

Chapter 9. The Eucharist.

Now concerning the Eucharist, give thanks this way. First, concerning the cup:

We thank thee, our Father, for the holy vine of David Thy servant, which You madest known to us through Jesus Thy Servant; to Thee be the glory for ever..

And concerning the broken bread:

We thank Thee, our Father, for the life and knowledge which You madest known to us through Jesus Thy Servant; to Thee be the glory for ever. Even as this broken bread was scattered over the hills, and was gathered together and became one, so let Thy Church be gathered together from the ends of the earth into Thy kingdom; for Thine is the glory and the power through Jesus Christ for ever.

But let no one eat or drink of your Eucharist, unless they have been baptized into the name of the Lord; for concerning this also the Lord has said, "Give not that which is holy to the dogs."

Chapter 14. Christian Assembly on the Lord's Day.

But every Lord's day gather yourselves together, and break bread, and give thanksgiving after having confessed your transgressions, that your sacrifice may be pure. But let no one who is at odds with his fellow come together with you, until they be reconciled, that your sacrifice may not be profaned. For this is that which was spoken by the Lord: "In every place and time offer to me a pure sacrifice; for I am a great King, says the Lord, and my name is wonderful among the nations."

St. Clement of Rome

Letter to the Corinthians, ch. 15 :

(Le Maître) nous a prescrit de nous acquitter des offrandes et du service divin (τὰς προσφορὰς καὶ λειτουργίαν) non pas au hasard et sans ordre, mais en des temps et à des heures fixées. »

- Fr. Iscara : The first letter of St. Clement compares the Bishop, presbyters and deacons at the Eucharist with the high priest, priests and levites of the Temple of Jerusalem. That presupposes that all was done with dignity and order by the various hierarchical orders which, together with the people, made up the worshipping Mystical Body.

St. Justin Martyr, ca. 105 – ca. 165 A.D.

1st Apology to the Emperor Antoninus Pius, 150/155 A.D :

65. After thus washing the one who has believed and has been added to us, we bring him to those who are called brothers. There they are gathered to pray together intently, both for themselves and for the one who has been enlightened, as well as all the others in every place...

Having finished these prayers, we salute one another with a kiss. Then, to the one who presides over the brothers (τῷ προεστῶτι τῶν ἀδελφῶν) bread and a chalice of wine mixed with water are brought forth; taking them, he sends up praise and glory to the Father of all through the name of the Son and the Holy Ghost and gives thanks for a long time for the fact that He has deemed us

worthy of these things. When he has finished these prayers and this thanksgiving, all the people present affirm it, saying, “Amen.” This “Amen” in Hebrew signifies, “So be it.”

Once he who presides has given thanks and all the people have affirmed it, those who are called by us deacons give to each of those present to partake of the bread and wine and water over which thanks have been given; and they carry them away to those who are not present.

66. Now, we call this food the Eucharist [εὐχαριστία: thanksgiving], of which no one may lawfully partake unless he believes that what is taught by us is true, and has been washed with that washing which is for the forgiveness of sins, and lives according to the instructions that Christ has given us.

For we do not partake of these things as common bread and common drink; but, even as Jesus Christ through the word of God was made flesh, and had flesh and blood for our salvation, so we have been taught that the food, over which thanks have been given by the word of prayer which is from him, and by which our own flesh and blood are nourished by transformation, is the flesh and blood of that same Jesus who was made flesh.

For the apostles, in the records made by them, which are called the Gospels, thus instructed us, that this was committed to them: that Jesus, taking bread, and having given thanks, said: Do this in remembrance of Me, for this is my body; and similarly, taking up the chalice and giving thanks, he said: This is my blood. And He gave it to them alone to partake of...

67. And on the day which is named after the Sun all who dwell in the cities or in the country gather together, and the records of the apostles or the writings of the prophets are read, for as long as time permits. Then, when the reader has finished, the one presiding addresses us with a speech and incites us to imitate these glorious things. Then we all stand up together and send up prayers; and, (as we explained above), when we have finished our prayer, the bread and wine and water are brought forth, and the one who presides gives thanks in like manner according to his ability (ὅση δύναμις αὐτῷ), and the people approve of it, saying the Amen, and to each is given a participation in that over which thanks have been given, and it is sent by deacons to those not present.

St. Irenaeus: ca. 140 – ca. 202 A.D.

Adversus Haereses (Against the Heresies), ca. 180 A.D.

4.17.5 But counseling his disciples to offer to God the first-fruits of his creatures... he took a loaf of bread, which is a created thing, and gave thanks, saying, *This is my body*. And the chalice, which likewise is among the created things in our use, he proclaimed to be his blood, and taught the new oblation of the new testament; and the Church, receiving this oblation from the Apostles, offers it throughout the whole world, as the first-fruits of what has been bestowed on her in the new testament, to God, who gives us nourishment.

Concerning this, Malachias, one of the Twelve Prophets, thus prophecied: I do not take pleasure in you, saith the Lord almighty, and I will not receive your sacrifices from your hands; for from the rising to the setting of the sun my name is glorified among the nations, and in every place incense and a clean sacrifice is offered to my name, for my name is great among the nations, saith the Lord almighty. By these words, he evidently signified that the former people will cease to offer [sacrifice] to God, but in every place a sacrifice—and this a pure one—will be offered to Him; and his name is glorified among the nations.

4.18.2. Oblations, as such, have not been rejected; for there were oblations then, and there are oblations now; sacrifices in the [Jewish] people, and sacrifices in the Church; only the kind (species) has changed, for now sacrifice is offered, not by slaves, but by the free.

4.18.4. How will those [heretics] be certain that the bread over which thanksgiving is made is the body of their Lord, and that the chalice is of his blood, if they do not say that he is the Son of the Maker of the world, that is, his Word, through whom trees bear fruit, and rivers flow, and the earth gives first the grass, then the tuft, then the whole ear of wheat?

4.18.5. How do they assert that the flesh that has been nourished with the body of the Lord and with his blood goes into corruption, and does not partake of life? Let them change their opinion, or else let them abstain from offering the same. For our opinion is in accord with the Eucharist; and the Eucharist reinforces our opinion.

St. Cyprian, ca. 200 – 258 A.D.

Epistle n.63.

4. Thou art a priest forever according to the order of Melchisedech. This order comes from that sacrifice and is derived from it; from the fact that Melchisedech was a priest of the most high God, that he offered bread and wine, and that he blessed Abraham. For who was a priest of God most high, more than our Lord Jesus Christ, who offered sacrifice to God the Father, and offered the same thing that Melchisedech had offered, namely, bread and wine, which is his own body and blood?

9. We find that the chalice that the Lord offered was mixed [i.e., contained wine that was mixed with water], and that it was wine that He called his blood. Wherefore, it appears that the blood of Christ is not offered if there be not wine in the chalice; nor is the Lord's sacrifice celebrated with a lawful sanctification, unless our oblation and sacrifice correspond to the Passion.

13. Because Christ carried us all—he bore also our sins—in the water we see that the people is understood, while in the wine we see that the blood of Christ is shown. When the wine is mixed with the water in the chalice, the people are united with Christ, and the gathering of believers is joined and united to him in whom they have believed.

14. If Christ Jesus, our Lord and God, is himself the high priest of God the Father, and offered himself as a sacrifice to the Father and commanded that this be done in his commemoration, then without a doubt the priest who imitates what Christ did truly performs his function in the place of Christ; and if he should begin to offer according to what he knows Christ himself to have offered, then he offers a true and full sacrifice in the Church to God the Father.

St. Cyril of Jerusalem, 313 – 386 A.D.

Fourth Mystical Catechism (n.22), 348 A.D.

1. (...) Since he pronounced and stated concerning the bread, *This is my body*, who will dare to be in doubt any longer? And since he confirmed and stated, *This is my blood*, who would ever waver, saying that it is not his blood?

2. Once, in Cana of Galilee, he changed water into wine, which is akin to blood; and is he not worthy of belief, having changed wine into blood? Called to a marriage of the flesh, he worked this stupendous marvel; how much more so shall we not confess that he has given the fruition of his body and blood to the sons of the [spiritual] nuptial chamber?

3. Wherefore, being wholly persuaded, let us partake as of the body and blood of Christ. For in the figure of bread the body is given to you, and in the figure of wine the blood is given to you, in order that, partaking of the body and blood of Christ, you may be made of one body and one blood with him. For thus we become Christ-bearers, his body and blood being distributed throughout our members. Thus, according to blessed Peter, we become partakers of the divine nature.

6. Therefore, do not consider the bread and wine as if they were nothing more; for, according to the Lord's assertion, they become the body and blood of Christ. For, even if your senses suggest this to you, let the Faith render your judgment firm. Judge not the matter according to the taste; but be filled with certitude by the Faith that you have been deemed worthy to be given the body and blood of Christ.

9. Having learned these things, and being fully certain that what appears to be bread is not bread, even though it be perceptible to the taste, but is the body of Christ, and that what appears to be wine is not wine, even though the taste would make you think so, but is the blood of Christ, and that in reference to this David the psalmist said long ago, And bread strengthens the heart of man to gladden his face with oil, be strengthened in your heart, partaking of It as something spiritual, and gladden the face of your soul.

Fifth Mystical Catechism (n.23), 348 A.D.

4. After these things, the priest cries out: Lift up your hearts. (...) Then you respond: We have lifted them up to the Lord.

5. Then the priest says: Let us give thanks to the Lord. (...) Then you say: It is meet and just.

6. After these things, we call to mind the heavens and the earth and the sea, the sun and the moon, the stars, all rational and irrational creation, the visible and the invisible, the angels, archangels, virtues, dominations, principalities, powers, thrones, and the cherubim with their many faces, saying energetically those words of David, Magnify the Lord with me. We also recall the seraphim whom Isaias beheld in the Holy Ghost standing in a circle around the throne of God, covering the

face with two wings, and the feet with two others, and flying with the two remaining, and saying, Holy holy holy Lord of hosts. For we recite this doxology, which has been handed on to us from the seraphim, in order that by this hymnody we may have fellowship with the supernal armies.

7. Then, having sanctified ourselves through these spiritual hymns, we beseech God, who so loves men, that He might send down the Holy Ghost upon the offerings, that He might make the bread the body of Christ, and the wine the blood of Christ; for whatever the Holy Ghost touches is sanctified and transformed.

8. Then, after the spiritual sacrifice, the unbloody worship, has been consummated, we entreat God over that sacrifice of propitiation for the common peace of the churches, for the right state of the world, for kings, for soldiers and allies, for those who are sick, for the afflicted, and generally for all who are in need of help; all of us with supplications offer up this sacrifice.

9. Then we also call to memory those who have fallen asleep: first of all the patriarchs, the prophets, the apostles and martyrs, that by their prayers and intercessions God may accept our petition. Then [we pray] also for the holy fathers and bishops who have fallen asleep, and generally for all who have fallen asleep before us, believing that it will be of the greatest help to those souls for whom we send up supplication, since a holy and most tremendous victim is lying before us.

10. I want to persuade you of this with an example. For I have known many who say: What good does it do to a soul departing from this world, whether with sins or without sins, that it be remembered in prayer? Well then, if some king were to send into exile persons who had given him offense, and then those who were close to them, weaving a crown, brought it to him on behalf of those whom he had punished, would he not relax their punishments? So in this way, bringing our supplications to God on behalf of the departed (even though they be sinners), we do not weave a crown, but we offer Christ slaughtered on account of our sins, propitiating, for them and for us, God who so loves men.

St. John Chrysostom, 344 – 407 A.D.

De Sacerdotio (On the Priesthood), 381 – 385 A.D.

When you see the Lord immolated and lying [on the altar], and the high priest standing and praying over the sacrifice, and everyone being made red with that precious blood, do you then still think that you are among men and standing on this earth, or do you not rather think that you are being taken up to heaven?

Homily on the Betrayal of Judas, 388 A.D.

Christ is present; the same one who furnished that table furnishes this one now. For it is not man who makes the offerings become the body and blood of Christ, but the very one who was crucified for us, Christ. Imitating him, the priest stands uttering those words, but the power and the grace is of God. This is my body, he says. This word transforms the offerings.

Homilies on the First Epistle to the Corinthians, ca. 392 A.D.

24.1. The chalice of benediction that we bless, is it not the partaking of the blood of Christ? He has said it in a manner exceedingly faithful and fearful. For here is what he says: this, which is in the chalice, is the blood that flowed from his side, and of that blood we partake. He called it the chalice of benediction, for holding it in our hands we sing his praises, being filled with wonder and astonishment at this unspeakable gift, blessing him for having poured out this blood, so that we might not abide in our error; he not only poured it out, but he also gave it to all of us to partake of. Therefore, if you desire blood, he says, redden not the altar of idols with the blood of brutes, but dye my altar red with my blood. What is more tremendous than this? What is more desirable? Tell me.