

Worship – Liturgy Parts (by Reverend Paul H. Lang)

The Preparation

The Invocation and Confession of Sins

Following an opening prelude and hymn, we invoke the presence of the Triune God in Whose Name we are assembled for worship. Our worship is directed to the Father, through the Son, in the Holy Ghost.

In order to have fellowship and communion with God, however, we must have pure hearts and clean hands. And so we join in the Confession of Sins. This is a preparatory office of spiritual purification. By it we are made clean to enter into the Service proper which begins with the Introit.

The Ministry of the Word

The Introit, Kyrie, and Gloria in Excelsis

"Introibo ad altare Dei" (I will go unto the altar of God) is still said by the minister in many churches before he goes up to the altar. The Introit, which include the Gloria Patri, is the entrance song of the Service. Like the overture of a great opera, it sets the tone and expresses the theme of the Sunday or holy day. And since each day has its own thoughts and moods, we must look up and follow the Introit and the other "propers" (Collect, Epistle, Gradual, Gospel) as well as the regular parts or "ordinaries" of the service.

In the Kyrie we greet God as the people of old greeted their king when he came to them. The people welcomed him and cried to him for help. Likewise, the Kyrie is the unceasing cry for mercy of a world suffering from the curse of sin. It embraces not only our own but without exception all the misery, suffering, and affliction of humanity.

God's answer to the Kyrie is the redemptive work of Christ. For this we adore and praise Him in the Gloria Excelsis, and ancient and beautiful canticle which begins with the angels' Christmas carol, swells into a profound adoration of the Holy Trinity, and centers in the theme of "The Lamb of God which taketh away the sin of the world."

The Salutation and Collect

In Lutheran worship pastor and people worship God together. Everyone does his part. This is expressed in the Salutation, which is a mutual exchange of a wish—the wish that Christ may dwell in each one's heart.

Then we are united with all our fellow-believers as we pray the Collect, which is the Church's prayer for a particular Sunday or feast.

The Epistle, Gradual, and Gospel

Up to this point we have been speaking to God. However, our invocation, psalmody, and prayers have all looked forward to hearing His Word. Reverently and silently we now listen as God speaks to us in the Epistle.

Between the Epistle and the Gospel the Gradual and other chants give us time for mediation. Then we rise to hear the Gospel. In the liturgical sense Christ Himself here speaks to us. We honor Him by standing, and we praise Him by the two versicles: "Glory be to thee, O Lord" and "Praise be to Thee, O Christ."

The Creed, Hymn, and Sermon

Now we confess our faith in the Creed and prepare ourselves for the sermon by singing the Hymn which fits the theme of the day.

The Sermon, like the other parts of the service, is an act of worship. In it God speaks to us through the minister. He is the living witness of the Gospel, applying the Word of God to our own times and conditions.

The Ministry of the Sacrament

The Offertory, Offerings, and General Prayer

The Offertory chant is not a response to the sermon, but the beginning of the second half of the service or, if the Blessed Sacrament is not celebrated, the general response to the Ministry of the Word.

This chant is connected with the gathering of our offerings which we give as an expression of our love and gratitude for God's blessings.

Then we offer our prayers for all men. The General Prayer is our united supplication and intercession for the Church, our government, and all people in their vocations and needs.

The Preface, Sanctus,

Lord's Prayer and Words of Institution

What makes the chief Service in the Lutheran Church the "chief" Service is this, that it culminates in the Sacrament of Holy Communion. When our Lord gathered His disciples together on the night in which He was betrayed, He instituted the Holy Communion and said, "Do this in remembrance of Me." We are brought together in the worship of the Church by our obedience to this command and our need for the benefits of the Blessed Sacrament.

The Salutation at this point is again a reminder of the fact that we are worshipping together. Then, lifting up our hearts to the Lord and giving Him

thanks, we begin the Lord's Supper with the Preface and include in it a Proper Preface which states the particular day's reason for our thanksgiving.

In the Sanctus we unite with angels and arch-angels and with all the Church in heaven and on earth to adore our gracious God and to bless His Son who came for our redemption and still comes to us in His Word and Sacrament.

Now we say our distinctive prayer of fellowship in Christ, the Lord's Prayer, which is hers also our table prayer. And then the celebrant consecrates the Bread and the Cup with the Words of Institution. Everyone who receives the holy Body and precious Blood of Christ given and shed on the Cross for him.

The Pax, Agnus Dei, and Distribution

All is now ready for this holy communion with Christ and all the members of His Body in the Sacrament of His Real Presence. The Pax is a short benediction preceding our communion. Following it, we sing the communion hymn of the adoration of our Savior, the Agnus Dei. Then all who partake of the Sacrament in the Distribution receive individually by faith the benefits and blessings of Christ's redemptive work and are sustained and nourished in their spiritual life in Christ.

Thanksgiving, and Benediction

Satisfaction and peace fill our hearts. With Simeon of old we sing the Nunc Dimittis: "Lord, now lettest Thou Thy servant depart in peace." Again we remind one another of the goodness and mercy of God, and then we join in the post-communion prayer of thanksgiving.

Before we leave the house of God, we express our mutual fellowship again in the Salutation. We exhort one another to bless and thank. God, and then we bow our heads to receive the Benediction. With this we go forth to live our lives in unity with God the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, knowing that His face will shine upon us and that He will bless and keep us.

This, very briefly, is Lutheran worship. It centers in the Cross of Christ. In it God speaks and gives to us and we speak and give to God. We participate in the fellowship of the Communion of Saints. We use the forms of worship which the believers of all ages have employed. It is both dynamic and dramatic.

"The Reverend Paul H. Lang graduated from Concordia Seminary, St. Louis in 1925. He was dominically ordered to serve in the Preaching Office at Trinity Lutheran Church at Palo Alto, California and as campus pastor at Stanford University where he remained until he retired in 1966. He was called to his eternal rest on 25 January 1981. Lang published seven books and pamphlets including Ceremony and Celebration and The Lutheran Order of Service in addition to numerous journal articles."