

# EXPLORING OUR FAITH

## A Walk Through the Sunday Service Session 19 – Eucharistic Thanksgiving

*This is an installment in a series, adapted from notes in the Sunday bulletins at St. Andrew's, that is exploring our Sunday worship. What we do. How and why we do it. History, theology, the way worship connects us with the mystery of God in Jesus Christ. Questions and comments are welcome.*

**Christian worship began with the Eucharist.** The very earliest traces we have of Christian worship show that it involved a celebratory gathering of readings, prayer and a sacramental meal. The first Christians were Jews, or pagans attracted to Judaism but hesitant to follow Jewish cultic practices like circumcision and dietary laws. These Christians gathered in private homes on Sunday, the day of the Resurrection. Their worship, described first in St. Paul's letters, gradually developed into the form of the liturgy we celebrate today. These gatherings were centered on thanksgiving.

**Eucharist means thanksgiving.** The Greek word *ευχαριστία* or eucharist means thanksgiving. Christian worship began, and continues, as an act of thanksgiving to God. Especially of thanksgiving for the gift of his Son, Jesus Christ. This very simple fact is expressed in the very beginning of the eucharistic prayer, called the *Sursum corda* (Latin for "Lift up [your] hearts"):

*Presider* Let us give thanks to the Lord our God.

*People* It is right to give him thanks and praise.

*Presider* It is right and a good and joyful thing, always and everywhere to give thanks to you, Father Almighty, Creator of heaven and earth.

**How do we give thanks?** After this beginning, the eucharistic liturgy then proceeds to give thanks by reciting – to remind us of – the saving acts of God through salvation history. This recitation may be quite brief, concentrating on the sacrifice of Christ (Prayer A), or it may be very full (Prayer D). In any case, it is a prayer said in blessing over the bread and wine, symbols of our lives that we have offered on the Altar. Symbolically in these Elements what we are doing is offering "our selves, our souls and bodies" as a "living sacrifice" to God (BCP p. 336). In subsequent bulletins we will return to this in more detail, but for now it is important to see that thanksgiving is an action that incorporates us into the sacrificial thanksgiving of Jesus. Like his, our sacrifice is of our whole lives. Like his, our sacrifice involves a letting go. This letting go involves a breaking or dying. But as with Jesus, the result of this thanksgiving is to receive back transformed and resurrected life: to be made one in the Body of Christ.