

EXPLORING OUR FAITH

A Walk Through the Sunday Service

Session 22 – The Eucharistic Action, Step 2: Blessing

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.

Following the eucharistic action. In our exploration of the Holy Communion half of the Eucharist we have noted that all eucharistic prayers (prayers of consecration) have a common pattern, what is known as the “fourfold action” of the Eucharist: 1) Take (take to the Altar); 2) Bless (give thanks and invoke the power of the Holy Spirit); 3) Break (symbolic of sacrifice and the Crucifixion); and 4) Share (distribution of Communion and dismissal for service as Christ’s body in the world). This morning we explore the second of these steps, “Blessing.”

Remembrance. The Blessing step of the eucharistic action begins with a recitation of “salvation history”: the story of God’s saving action in the world, beginning with creation and culminating in the death and resurrection of Jesus. The whole Eucharist is shaped by the remembrance of this action as Jesus himself at the Last Supper commanded us: “do this for the remembrance of me.” The Greek word translated as remembrance is *anamnesis*. It means not merely a mental recollection, but an enacted, participatory making present of a past action. In the Eucharist we “make present” and ourselves are incorporated spiritually in the action of Christ.

Offering. This remembrance and making present culminate in the Offertory (which occurs here in the eucharistic prayer, not when the gifts are first brought to the Table). The presider says, “Recalling his death, resurrection, and ascension, we offer you these gifts.” Again, this Offering has a more profound meaning than how we commonly think. It entails the complete letting go of our ownership, control and self-centeredness, the complete handing over of our selves (symbolized in the bread and wine) to God. We are doing sacramentally what Jesus did in offering himself on the Cross.

Invocation. After the Offertory, the presider invokes the presence of the Holy Spirit, saying, “Sanctify them [bread and wine] to be for your people the Body and Blood of your Son.” The presider then adds, “Sanctify us also, that we may faithfully receive this holy Sacrament.” There is this double invocation or, to use the Greek term for it, *epiclesis*. Having emptied ourselves in the Offertory, we are now filled with God’s Spirit. In a later one of these notes we will discuss the theological interpretations of all this – transubstantiation, Real Presence, and more – but for now it is enough to note that the Blessing step in the eucharistic action results in transformation: of bread and wine and of us.