



AN AGAPE LITURGY FOR SUNDAYS

By the Rev. Deon K. Johnson

Christians have, from the first Easter morning, gathered on Sunday, the Lord's Day, to celebrate the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead and, through Holy Baptism, be united with one another as the Body of Christ. In vast cathedrals and small rural churches, in living rooms and coffee shops, Christians have stood with Mary Magdalene to proclaim, "I have seen the Lord!"

The Holy Eucharist, the liturgies of the Word and Table, has always been central to the celebration of the Lord's Day. In those times when the Holy Eucharist could not be safely celebrated, the people of God gathered to feast on the Word; to read, mark, learn, and inwardly digest the sacred stories of God's presence in the world.

During this time while it is not safe for the Body of Christ to gather in our buildings as is customary, the work and worship of the Church continues. The liturgy below is intended to be used for in-person, online or as a hybrid worship. This liturgy takes its central meaning from Agape Meals celebrated in the Early Church and revived in the Book of Occasional Services of the Episcopal Church.

Prepare a sacred space with the following items:

A cross, a bible candles, stones, breads, wine or grape juice, a simple meal and additional prayer aids (prayer beads, icons etc.).

A vessel containing water may be kept in or added to the sacred space as a reminder of our baptism. On special days and Feasts of the Church, the Thanksgiving for the Gift of Water (page 4) may be added.

GATHERING: LITURGY OF THE WORD

The people of God gather together.

Instrumental music may be played or appropriate songs/hymns may be sung.

OPENING RITE: LITURGY OF LIGHT

All stand, and the Officiant greets the people with these words.

Officiant Dear friends in the risen Christ, we gather today to celebrate the Lord's Day, and for a time to be united in prayer and praise with each other and those who have gone before us. Sunday has been called the Lord's Day because it was on this day that Jesus conquered sin and death and rose to new life. As we gather [in-person and/or online], let us be united in the spirit of Christ with the Church around the world and celebrate our redemption in Christ's suffering, death and resurrection.

Silence may be kept for a time.

Officiant Light and peace, in Jesus Christ our Lord.

People ***Thanks be to God.***

One or more of the following passages of Scripture may be read.

In the beginning when God created the heavens and the earth, the earth was a formless void and darkness covered the face of the deep, while a wind from God swept over the face of the waters. Then God said, "Let there be light"; and there was light. And God saw that the light was good; and God separated the light from the darkness. God called the light Day, and the darkness he called Night. And there was evening and there was morning, the first day. Genesis 1:1-6

Jesus said, "You are the light of the world. A city built on a hill cannot be hid. No one lights a lamp to put it under a bucket, but on a lamp-stand where it gives light for everyone in the house. And you, like the lamp, must shed light among your fellow men, so that they may see the deed you do, and give glory to your Father in heaven." Matthew 5:14-16

It is not ourselves that we proclaim; we proclaim Christ Jesus as Lord, and ourselves as your servants, for Jesus' sake. For the same God who said, "Out of darkness let light shine," has caused his light to shine within us, to give the light of revelation—the revelation of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ. 2 Corinthians 4:5-6

PRAYER FOR CHRIST'S LIGHT

Candles may now be lit using one of the following prayer.

Officiant O God, we give thanks for the gift of your light —shining on the first day of creation, guiding us through the wilderness, leading us to the land of promise.

People ***You sent Jesus, light of the world, to be our way of truth and life. Help us to follow him each day and rest in him each night until at last we come to live with you in endless light. Through Jesus Christ our Lord and with the Holy Spirit we give you honor and glory, now and always. Amen.***

Or

Officiant May the light of Christ gloriously risen dispel the darkness of our hearts and minds.

People ***May this simple flame of love and hope be found still burning by the Morning Star; the one Morning Star who never sets, Christ your Son, who, coming back from death's domain, has shed his light on humanity, and lives and reigns for ever and ever. Alleluia! Amen.***

THE CONFESSION

As we worship we ask God's forgiveness for things done and things left undone and things done on our behalf so that we are reconciled to God and each other.

Officiant Let us confess our sins against God and our neighbors.

Silence is kept for a time.

Officiant Most merciful God, we confess that we have sinned against you in thought, word, and deed; By what we have done, and by what we have left undone.

People ***We have not loved you with our whole heart; we have not loved our neighbors as ourselves. We are truly sorry and we humbly repent.***

Officiant For the sake of your Son Jesus Christ, have mercy on us and forgive us;

People ***That we may delight in your will, and walk in your ways, to the glory of your Name. Amen.***

Officiant Almighty God have mercy on us, forgive us all our sins through our Lord Jesus Christ, strengthen us in all goodness, and by the power of the Holy Spirit keep us in eternal life.

People ***Amen.***

Music may be played or a hymn sung

OPENING ACCLAMATION

The Officiant then says.

Officiant Blessed be God: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

People ***And blessed be God's kingdom, now and for ever. Amen.***

Or

Officiant Blessed be the one, holy, and living God.

People ***Glory to God for ever and ever. Amen.***

Or

Officiant Blessed be our God.

People ***Now and forever. Amen.***

Other seasonal acclamations may be used.

The Officiant may add

Almighty God, to you all hearts are open, all desires known, and from you no secrets are hid: Cleanse the thoughts of our hearts by the inspiration of your Holy Spirit, that we may perfectly love you, and worthily magnify your holy Name; through Christ our Lord. Amen.

SONG OF PRAISE

A song of praise may be prayed or sung.

THE COLLECT OF THE DAY

Officiant The Lord be with you. *Or* God is with you.
People **And also with you.** *And also with you.*
Officiant Let us pray.

The Officiant continues with the prayer appointed for the day called the collect. The collect is written to go along with both the season of the church year and the readings of the day. It summarizes the attributes of God as revealed in the scripture of the day.

THE READINGS

We hear the stories of the experience of God from our spiritual ancestors. Reading and commenting on scripture goes back to the earliest services of Christianity. Following the pattern of Jewish synagogue worship, readings follow a set pattern for what will be read when. One or two Lessons, as appointed, are read, the Reader first saying

A READING FROM THE HEBREW BIBLE.

At the end of the reading the Reader says.

Reader The Word of the Lord. *Or* *Reader* Hear what the Holy Spirit is saying to God's people.
People **Thanks be to God.** *People* **Thanks be to God.**

THE PSALM OF THE DAY

The psalms are a part of the poetry of the Hebrew people. They express joy and sadness, loneliness and thanksgiving as part of the human longing to be united with God.

THE SECOND READING

A READING FROM THE NEW TESTAMENT WRITINGS.

At the end of the reading the Reader says.

Reader The Word of the Lord. *Or* *Reader* Hear what the Holy Spirit is saying to the Church.
People **Thanks be to God.** *People* **Thanks be to God.**

A hymn or instrumental music may be played.

THE GOSPEL

Officiant The Holy Gospel of our Savior Jesus Christ according to _____.
People **Glory to you, O Christ.**

At the end of the Gospel the Officiant says

Officiant The Gospel of the Lord.
People **Praise to you, O Christ.**

THE SERMON

Having someone comment on the scriptures goes back to the earliest days of Christianity and to the Jewish Synagogue worship which preceded it.

Here an online sermon or a reflection on the Gospel appointed for the day may be viewed or read.

THANKSGIVING FOR THE GIFT OF WATER

When there are occasions for a reminder of our Baptism (birthdays, anniversaries, Major Feasts of the church etc.) the following may be added.

The bowl of water is placed next to the lit candles.

The water is a reminder of our Baptism into the life, death and resurrection of Jesus.

Officiant Let us now call to mind our baptism into Christ's life, death, and resurrection.

People **We thank you O God for your love in all creation, especially for your gift of water to sustain, refresh and cleanse all life. We thank you that through the waters of baptism you cleanse us, renew us by your Spirit and raise us to new life. In the new covenant we are made members of your Church and share in your eternal kingdom. We pray that all who have passed through the waters of baptism may continue for ever in the risen life of Christ. Through Christ, in the unity of the Holy Spirit, all praise and thanks be yours, Redeemer God, now and for ever. Amen.**

The water may now be used to make the sign of the cross as a reminder of our baptism.

AFFIRMATION OF FAITH.

Originally the entire service was viewed as our confession of faith. However, since the Sixth Century, the church has recited either the Nicene Creed or the Apostle's Creed at the Eucharist. The word creed comes from the Latin credo for "I believe" or "I lend my heart to."

Either the Nicene, or the Apostle's Creed or the following may be used.

Officiant Let us affirm our faith.

Do you believe in God?

People **We believe in God the Father the almighty, Creator of heaven and earth.**

Officiant Do you believe in Jesus Christ?

People **We believe in Jesus Christ, God's only Son our Lord, who was conceived by the power of the Holy Spirit and born of the Virgin Mary. He suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified, died and was buried. He descended to the dead. On the third day he rose again. He ascended into heaven, and is seated at the right hand of God. He will come again to judge the living and the dead.**

Officiant Do you believe in the Holy Spirit?

People **We believe in the Holy Spirit, the holy catholic Church, the communion of saints, the forgiveness of sins, the resurrection of the body, and the life everlasting. Amen.**

THE PRAYERS OF THE PEOPLE

Prayer changes people. Prayer is not about changing God but about changing us more into the likeness of God. Collectively and individually we offer the hopes and desires of our hearts to God.

Suitable prayers may be offered at this time for:

The Universal Church, its members, and its mission

The Nation and all in authority

The welfare of the world

The concerns of the local community

Those who suffer and those in any trouble

The departed (with commemoration of a saint when appropriate)

During the prayers the community is invited to hold a stone, prayer beads or other prayer aids as a physical reminder that all our lives are filled with prayer.

The Prayers conclude with the following or other suitable prayer.

Officiant God of love, our refuge and our strength, hear the prayers of your Church, and grant us today what we ask of you in faith. Through Christ our Lord. Amen.

THE LORD'S PRAYER

Officiant Let us pray in the way that Christ taught us.

People ***OUR FATHER, who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name. Thy Kingdom come, thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread. And forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive those who trespass against us. And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil. For thine is the kingdom, the power and the glory, for ever and ever. Amen.***

Or

People ***OUR FATHER IN HEAVEN, hallowed be your Name, your kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as in heaven. Give us today our daily bread. Forgive us our sins as we forgive those who sin against us. Save us from the time of trial, and deliver us from evil. For the kingdom, the power, and the glory are yours, now and for ever. Amen.***

THE AGAPE

*While sharing a common Eucharistic celebration is not possible at this time, this liturgy expresses our longing for a time when we can once more share and gather together at the Eucharistic table. This practice of giving thanks for bread, wine and food is ancient, going back to the hospitality our ancestor Abraham showed to his visitors. While **not** the full celebration of the Holy Eucharist, there is a relationship, in much the same way that giving thanks over water is a reminder of our Baptism.*

Instrumental music may be played or a hymn sung. A suitable space is prepared with wine, bread, and other foods.

The Officiant and people give thanks for the gift of wine.

Officiant Blessed are you, O Lord our God, Ruler of the universe.

People ***You create the fruit of the vine; we long for the day when you will once again refresh us with the cup of salvation in the Blood of your Son Jesus Christ. Glory to you for ever and ever. Amen.***

The Officiant and people give thanks for the gift of our daily bread.

Officiant Blessed are you, O Lord our God, Ruler of the universe.

People ***You bring forth bread from the earth; we long for the day when we may once again partake of the bread of life the Body of your Son Jesus Christ. As grain scattered upon the earth is gathered into one loaf, so gather your Church in every place into the kingdom of your Son. To you be glory and power forever and ever. Amen.***

The Officiant and people give thanks for the gift of food.

Officiant Blessed are you, O Lord our God, Ruler of the universe.

People ***You have blessed the earth to bring forth food to satisfy our hunger. Let this food strengthen us in the Eucharistic fast that is before us, that following our Savior in the way of the cross, we may come to the joy of his resurrection. For yours is the kingdom and the power and the glory, now and for ever. Amen.***

The wine, bread and food may be consumed after the liturgy.

THE CONCLUSION

Officiant God of all creation, we gather on this first day of the week made holy by the resurrection of Christ, your Son. In the waters of baptism we were buried with him so that we might also rise with him and so share his victory over sin and death.

People ***You have transformed our lives into the living stones that form your Church with Christ as the foundation stone. Strengthen our community's bond of communion and peace and deepen our solidarity with your Church throughout the world.***

Officiant Rekindle within us this Sabbath day the vision of your kingdom so that our daily concerns and labor may find their proper perspective.

People ***Fill our homes with the spirit of the Gospel and give us the grace to see the face of Christ in the people with whom we live. We raise our voices in praise and thanksgiving to you, O God; that we who have celebrated Christ's resurrection this day share in his eternal glory where he lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, God, for ever and ever. Amen.***

THE PEACE

The Peace is then exchanged.

Officiant The peace of Christ be always with you.

People ***And also with you.***

We greet each other in the name of the risen Christ.

A hymn or song may be sung.

THE SENDING

Officiant The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit, be with us all evermore.

People ***Amen. [Alleluia!]***

Officiant Let us bless the Lord. [Alleluia. Alleluia!]

People ***Thanks be to God. [Alleluia. Alleluia!]***

A simple meal may now be shared.