

LITURGICAL FORMATION & FOOTPRINTS OF GOD

Four main elements of Easter Liturgy

After observing Lent for five weeks, we eagerly await the observance of Holy Week. We start with Palm Sunday, days in Holy Week, Maundy Thursday, Good Friday, Easter Eve and the proclamation of Easter. On Good Friday, Jesus was crucified, and he died, but on the third day, he rose again. On Easter Eve and Easter Day, people commemorate Jesus's resurrection from the dead. These events are central to the proclamation of the gospel and a recollection of the fulfilment of the prophecies of the Old Testament, as well as the revelation of God's act of salvation for all of mankind.

In this article, we focus on the service of Easter Eve and its liturgical format so that we appreciate its importance. The service of Easter Eve is enriched by the invitation of the Easter Liturgy, which contains four main elements, mainly the service of light or the lighting of the Paschal candle, the Vigil, the rite of Initiation (Baptism) and the Eucharist.

Lighting of the Paschal Candle

Easter Eve service begins at sunset; the clergy carries the lit Paschal candle and enters the church. The lighting of the Paschal Candle symbolises Christ, the light of the world, and this candle is carried through the church and progressively passed to the whole congregation with the message that this light is the light of the world. This is a moving experience. Every member is given a candle, and they light their candles from the Paschal candle, eventually lighting the whole church with lit candles. Gradually, the altar candles are lit, and the lights are switched on.

The service of light proclaims the resurrection of Christ from the dead in word and action as well as in silence and sound. The Exsultet, an ancient Easter song of praise, is sung as a climax of this part of the liturgy. However, the Anthem is a long yet moving proclamation of the Lord's prophecies of the coming of a Saviour and the death and glorious resurrection.

The Vigil.

The Vigil is the first official celebration of the Resurrection of Jesus. Historically, it is a time when the new Christians are baptised, and those to be confirmed are received into the full communion of the church.

For Christians, it is a celebration of freedom and new life in Jesus Christ, who rose from death. From the early days, Christians preferred this day to be baptised, as they recall what God in history has done for them and how they are incorporated into the Body of Christ – the Church. It is not any other Sunday but a day where, together with all Christians, we rejoice with great joy and proclaim what God has done for his people.

During Vigil, the church keeps watch throughout the night and meditates on the mighty works of God and in the early hours of the new day, the acclamation of the mystery of Jesus Christ resounds in the Church with Alleluias. At the heart of the Easter Vigil lies the key passages of God's saving love for mankind.

The Vigil recalls the ancient hymn of triumph ("Exsultet"). The "Exsultet" is, in other words, known as the proclamation of Easter – where it traces the salvation story in the Old Testament to the New Testament in the person of Jesus Christ.

It links to the redemptive act of God through the exodus out of Egypt and the celebration of God's people during the Passover. The singing of the Exsultet reminds us of the mighty acts of God in history.

The Liturgy of Initiation.

As we know, Lent is a period of preparation to accept Jesus as their Lord and Saviour and their process of catechetical learning climaxes when they publicly proclaim their faith. The liturgy of Initiation is an event within the service where the candidates are incorporated into the family of the Church. It is also when the whole church reaffirms the baptismal vows as a public

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declaration of their union with Jesus together with those to be baptised. This gives a sense of belonging to those who are new and gives an identity as to the ethos of the Anglican community, and together, building a new generation who will lead the people of God for worship, which leads to mission.

The Eucharist

The celebration of Easter is the climax of the liturgy. The most appropriate time for a celebration of Holy Communion is in the early hours of Easter morning. Still, if it is celebrated at night, it should be as late as possible. In our diocese, churches celebrate Easter during their usual Sunday service times.

During the service, the acclamation resounds: Alleluia, Christ has died; Christ is Risen; Christ will come again or “When we eat this bread and drink this cup, we proclaim your Death, O Lord, until you come again. ” In the Byzantine form of the liturgy of St. James, it says, “We show forth your death, O Lord, and confess your resurrection.”

Within the ancient liturgies of St. Cyril, St. Basil and St. Gregory, the memorial acclamation is made up of a short prayer by the priest and followed by a congregational response. The two parts are referred to as “Anamnesis” and “Epiclesis”. The Anamnesis is where the priest says,

“Every time you eat this bread and drink this cup, you proclaim My Death; confess My Resurrection, and remember Me, till I come”.

The Epiclesis is where the congregation says-

“Amen, Amen, Amen Your Death, O Lord, we proclaim; Your holy Resurrection and Ascension into the heavens; we confess. We praise You, we bless You, we thank You, O Lord, and we entreat You, O our God.

Such is the beauty we inherited from old in our Anglican liturgy. The many references to the holy

scripture are reflected in the richness of the way we worship God.

The Anglican Church defines liturgy as “the work of the people”. It is congregational and participatory. It is the focal point of Anglican life, where the belief and liturgy are tied together when the church celebrates the sacraments (here, the Easter Liturgy is essential as she confesses the faith received from the Apostles through the Holy Scriptures whence the ancient saying *lex orandi lex credendi*”- the law of prayer is the Law of belief.

May our Easter proclamation of the mystery of the resurrection become the focus of our celebration. "May this Easter bring you hope, joy, and new beginnings as we worship the God we believe in with conviction. Happy Easter. As we celebrate Jesus's resurrection, let us remember the power of love and the importance of proclaiming the mysteries of Easter. Christ has died; Christ is Risen, and Christ will come again. Happy Easter!"

Written by

Bishop Charles Samuel

Reference:

1. Rama P. Coomaraswamy *The destruction of the Christian tradition* 2006 p279 "Not only is this an entirely new practice, but it implies that the Mystery of the Faith is the Death, Resurrection, and Final Coming of Our Lord, rather than His 'Real Presence' on the altar."
2. Stevenson, W. Taylor (1988). "Lex Orandi—Lex Credendi". In Sykes, Stephen; Booty, John E. (eds.). *The Study of Anglicanism*. London: SPCK/Fortress Press. pp. 174–188. ISBN 978-0-8006-2087-5.
3. <https://www.churchofengland.org/prayer-and-worship/worship-texts-and-resources/common-worship/church-year/holy-week-and-easter-3>