

FOUR MAIN ELEMENTS OF EASTER EVE LITURGY

In observing Lent faithfully, we eagerly await the observance of Holy Week. The week starts with Palm Sunday, days in Holy Week (Monday, Tuesday and Wednesday followed by the Triduum- Maundy Thursday, Good Friday, Easter Eve and Easter. The Triduum begins with Maundy Thursday – where Jesus instituted the Last Supper, an example of a shared meal, a demonstration of servanthood which ended up with the betrayal. On Good Friday, Jesus was crucified. On Easter Eve- the presence of an Empty Tomb and Easter Day, the proclamation that Jesus has risen 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, which reveals God’s act of salvation for all of mankind.

We focus on The Easter Eve Service- its liturgical format so as to appreciate its significance in the redemptive act of God. The structure of the service of the Vigil consist of four parts.

1. **The Service of Lights**

Begins outdoors with the lighting of the Paschal Candle from a new fire.

2. **The liturgy of the Word**

A series of readings tracing salvation history from Genesis to the New Testament.

3. **The Christian Initiation**

New members (catechumens) are baptised and confirmed.

4. **The Holy Eucharist**

The first service of the Easter season.

The Service of Lights – the Paschal Candle

Easter Eve service begins at sunset; the clergy prepare a place outside the church to light the new fire. The Paschal candle is lit with this new fire and blessed.

The lighting of the Paschal Candle symbolises Christ, the light of the world, risen from the darkness of the grave. The following inscription will be traced on the Paschal Candle – the cross symbol of life and death the first and last letter of Greek alphabet-Alpha and Omega- the beginning and the end of all things, the numerals of the current year, a reminder that in the year of the Lord of all ages is present here and now and the five “nails” inserted in the shape of a the cross, symbolizing the wounds of Christ. The celebrant will say “May the light of Christ, rising in glory banish all darkness from our hearts and minds.”

This candle is carried as a joyful procession through the church and progressively passed to the whole congregation with three stops. At every stop

the cantor will sing the “Light of Christ” and the congregation will respond “Thanks be to God.”

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

At this point the whole church is in darkness and the Light of Christ lights up by lighting the candles of the congregation. After the singing of the “Exsultet” gradually, the altar candles are lit, and the Church lights are switched on.

The liturgy of the Word (Vigil)

The Vigil-the oldest feature of the celebration of Easter is a vigil of watching and waiting which in early times the church kept throughout the night meditating on the mighty acts of God in Scriptures and praying till dawn when Christ’s resurrection was acclaimed. Some may keep this Vigil the whole night. Others may prefer instead to begin the liturgy with the Service of Light and then incorporate the Vigil readings into an extended Ministry of the Word.

During the Vigil the ancient hymn of triumph (“**Exsultet**”) is chanted. 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 (Baptism)

In the early centuries of the Church’s history, Baptism and Easter are intimately linked; this is the only time of the year when baptisms are administered. The process of catechetical learning climaxes when they publicly proclaim their faith. The liturgy of Initiation is an event within the service where the candidates not only confess their faith but are joyfully incorporated into the family of the Church.

If Baptisms does not take place at least it is a good time for the whole church reaffirms their baptismal vows as a public 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 Easter Eucharist

The celebration of Holy Eucharist is the climax of the Easter liturgy in which we are sacramentally reunited with our risen Lord. In our diocese, churches celebrate Easter during their usual Sunday service times.

During the service, the acclamation resounds: Alleluia Christ is Risen and the congregation joyfully resound; Alleluia, He is Risen Indeed. Alleluia. For Christ has died; Christ is Risen; Christ will come again. For God has gloriously raised him from the dead. His is the true Paschal Lamb offered for us and has taken away the sin of the world. By his death he has destroyed death and by his rising again he has restored to us eternal life.

Yet another proclamation in the service echoes “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 understands liturgy(worship) 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

REFERENCES:

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