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The following is a devotional guide to help you reflect on your sacramental experience of baptism and eucharist in light of the scriptures. Passages are included for each week along with questions, selections from different liturgies, and reflections on sacramental practice from several of the great mystagogues from the 4th century. They are designed to guide your study, prayer, and reflection throughout each week at a pace of your own choosing.

You may want to work with the study four days out of the week, using the first day for the experiential reflection, the second for the sacramental reflection, the third for the scriptural reflection, and the fourth for synthesis, but any approach that works with your schedule will be suitable.

Please use this devotional guide as a means to lead you into meditation and prayer about what God has to say to you through these sacred actions of worship. How has he used them to shape you? How does he want to use them even now to bring you deeper into your new life in Christ? What is he trying to say to you, and to his church, through the words, the symbols, the movement, and the memory of the sacraments?

Consider logging your journey in a journal, including impressions, insights, experiences, and questions from your study and worship.

I strongly suggest you read and reflect on the readings and questions as a family, helping your children, if you have them, with the process of writing their reflections in their journals. Make prayer and silence a part of your time together, and allow room for everyone to ask questions and wrestle with ideas. If you have younger children, consider these tips for including them:

- Have the children read the scripture passages
- Ask them for their thoughts. Use simple questions: what? when? where? who? how?
- Don't be afraid to add your comments. Children understand more than we expect.
- Ask younger children to draw pictures of scenes from the passages and then talk about them.

If you are working through these passages on your own, consider using an immersive, prayerful approach:

1. Find a quiet time and place. Free yourself from potential distractions as much as you can (have someone else deal with phone calls, children, doorbells).
2. Take a few minutes to clear your mind. Breathe slowly, relax your body, make yourself aware of the simple fact that God is present.
3. Read through the scriptures for the day, simply listening at first. Don't try to pick them apart, don't seek insight. Just read them, even aloud.
4. Pause for a moment. Did something jump out at you, a word or phrase? Make note of it in your journal.
5. Read the scriptures a second time, slowly. Listen again for anything that stands out, that causes you to linger for a moment. Make note of it in your journal.
6. Consider what God has brought to your attention. Meditate on the words or phrases that caught your attention.

7. Talk with God about what he's trying to say. Listen to what his Spirit is saying.
8. Write in your journal. What is God saying? Is he asking you to do something? Is he communicating something very personal, or something important for all of us? What new insight has he given. Can what he's said be put into words?

The guide is designed to work well with the Lenten and Easter seasons (Ash Wednesday through Pentecost), but not exclusively so. It can be used at any time for a period of fifteen weeks in the context of worship, a group study, family devotion, or individual devotion. It works well when moderated by a pastor or teacher in the context of a community of faith, but it is also well-suited to individual study and reflection.

If used during the Lenten and Easter seasons, you will find that the study integrates very well with the lectionary readings, especially during year A of the Revised Common Lectionary. Each week's study is designed to begin on the Sunday of the specified week.

Week one—Ash Wednesday

In baptism, Christ, through his Spirit, makes us a part of his body, the church, and new creatures, benefactors of his redemption of all creation and participants in bringing his new life to all the world.

Experiential reflection—remembering your baptism

- When were you baptized? As a baby, as a child, as an adult?
- If you were baptized as a child, do you remember seeing others baptized?
- Where were you baptized? What happened?
- Who baptized you? Who was there?
- How were you baptized? How did you get ready to be baptized?
- What else do you remember—what stuck with you (sights, sounds, smells, thoughts)?

Symbolic/liturgical reflection

Examine the following prayer from an Anglican baptismal liturgy. 1) Circle what it says that God is doing. 2) Underline what it says that we are doing. 3) Highlight what it says changes in us as a result of our baptism.

Dearly beloved in Christ, the Sacrament of Baptism is offered because our Lord Jesus Christ taught us that we cannot enter the kingdom of God unless we are born anew of water and the Holy Spirit. This new birth is necessary because all human beings have both a disposition towards evil and are also sinners. Therefore, I ask you to call upon God the Father, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that in his great mercy he will grant new birth to this child; that she may be baptized with water and the Holy Spirit, and received into Christ's holy Church and be made a living member thereof.

Almighty and everlasting God, who in mercy saved Noah and his family in the Ark when the great flood came, who safely led the children of Israel through the Red Sea, symbolizing thereby holy Baptism, and who by the Baptism in the river Jordan of your Son, Jesus Christ, sanctified water to the mystical washing away of sin; in your infinite mercy look on this child, wash and sanctify her by the Holy Spirit, we pray, in order that, being delivered from your wrath, she may be received into the Ark of Christ's Church. Make her to be steadfast in faith, joyful through hope, and rooted in love, so that passing through the waters of this troubled world, she may finally come to the land of everlasting life, there to reign with you forever; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen. (Taken from the SERVICES in Contemporary English from THE BOOK OF COMMON PRAYER of 1662 offered by the Anglican Mission in the Americas)

Consider the marks and highlights noticing the weight given to each.

- What does this prayer say about baptism?
- What kinds of images from the Bible are used in the prayer?
- What does it say is happening in baptism?

Read and reflect on these excerpts from the church fathers, John Chrysostom and Theodore of Mopsuestia. Notice how they describe baptism.

As you know, baptism is a burial and a resurrection: the old self is buried with Christ to sin and the new nature rises from the dead 'which is being renewed after the image of its creator.' We are stripped and we are clothed, stripped of the old garment which has been soiled by the multitude of our sins, clothed with the new that is free from all stain. What does this mean? We are clothed in Christ himself. St Paul remarks: 'As many of your were baptized into Christ have put on Christ' (Yarnold, 155-156, Chrysostom).

So when I am baptized and put my head under the water, I wish to receive the death and burial of Christ our Lord, and I solemnly profess my faith in his resurrection; when I come up out of the water, this is a sign that I believe that I am already risen.

These things only happen to us in symbols, but St Paul wishes to make clear that we are not concerned with empty symbols but with realities, in which we profess our faith with longing and without hesitation (Yarnold, 183, Theodore).

Scriptural reflection

Psalm 51

- What is the psalmist's attitude toward God? Himself?
- What role does water play in the change for which the psalmist prays?
- What is the result the psalmist expects from his confession and God's forgiveness and cleansing?

Rom. 6.1-14

- Is baptism something Paul assumes that his readers have experienced?
- What does Paul say is happening in baptism?
- What is the association Paul makes between grace, righteousness and baptism?
- What does this mean for us as we live each day? What does this mean for our future?

Synthesis

- Think about the difference baptism has made in your own life. What differences *should* it have made? What would it be like if you were not baptized into Christ?
- What are some ways you can begin to show the new life of baptism into Christ in your life?
- What are some ways you can share more in the new life of baptism into Christ in your church community?

Week two—first Lent

In baptism, the fullness of the promise of God's covenant with his people his fulfilled as we enter into his community, his church, to live the reality of his kingdom in worship, discipleship, fellowship, and mission.

Experiential reflection

- Was your baptism associated with membership in Christ's church?
- What ways has being a member of the body of Christ changed your life?
- What does living as a baptized Christian in the world mean to you?
- What does your church do that demonstrates the new life in Christ you all share through baptism?

Symbolic/liturgical reflection

Consider the following invitation to the newly baptized and admonition to the church community from the Catholic *Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults*.

My dear newly baptized, born again in Christ by baptism, you have become members of Christ and of his priestly people. Now you are to share in the out-pouring of the Holy Spirit among us, the Spirit sent by the Lord upon his apostles at Pentecost and given by them and their successors to the baptized.

The promised strength of the Holy Spirit, which you are to receive, will make you more like Christ and help you to be witnesses to his suffering, death, and resurrection. It will strengthen you to be active members of the Church and to build up the Body of Christ in faith and love.

With hands joined, the celebrant next addresses the people:

My dear friends, let us pray to God our Father, that he will pour out the Holy Spirit on these newly baptized to strengthen them with his gifts and anoint them to be more like Christ, the Son of God.

- What is the connection made between baptism and the gift of the Holy Spirit?
- What connection is made between baptism and membership in the body of Christ?
- What is the newly baptized person expected to do in the strength of the Spirit as a member of Christ's church?

Read and reflect on this excerpt from the church father, Theodore of Mopsuestia. Notice how he describes the connection between baptism and the body of Christ.

There is one baptism, because those whom we invoke have one will, one operation and one power, which enables us all to be born again and to become the one body of Christ whom we call our Head. In his human existence he was assumed from among us and became the first to rise from the dead, in this way assuring for us a share in his resurrection, which allows us to hope that our bodies too will be like his: "But our commonwealth is in heaven, and from it we await a Saviour, the Lord Jesus Christ, who will change our lowly body to be like his glorious body" [Phil. 3.20-21].

This prediction will be fulfilled in reality at the resurrection; at baptism we merely perform the signs and symbols. For the same reason, we are called,

according to St. Paul's saying, the body of Christ our Lord, who is our head: Christ is the head "from whom the whole body, nourished and knit together, grows with the growth that is from God" [Col. 2.19] (Yarnold, pp.194-195, Theodore).

Scriptural reflection

Matt. 28.19-20 (Genesis 22.1-18; Isaiah 42.1-9)

- What is the connection between God's covenant with Abraham, Jesus, and the church as the light to the nations (the whole world)?
- Why is baptism so central to what we call the Great Commission?
- What is baptism associated with in Jesus' command to his disciples? Is it described as optional or any less important than these others tasks?
- In whose name are we to be baptized?

Acts 2.37-42 (1 Chronicles 16.8-36)

- How is the calling of God's people in covenant and worship associated with God's glory and salvation?
- Why did Peter tell his listeners to be baptized? What else did he tell them to do? What did he say would be the result?
- What promise did Peter associate with repentance and baptism? For whom did Peter say the promise was given?
- What happened between Peter's admonition to be baptized and the baptism of his listeners?
- What did the newly baptized Christians do? What similarities do you see between what they did and the promise described in 1 Chronicles?

Synthesis

In Christ's admonition to his disciples and in Peter's answer to the question, "What should we do?" is found both the invitation to those who have not yet been baptized and the imperative to the baptized to realize the concrete reality and responsibility of their place in God's covenant community.

- What dimensions of that imperative do you realize are meant for you even now?
- What changes do you need to consider in your life as you prepare to live into the responsibilities and privileges of the baptized life?
- What ways can you expect the Spirit of Christ and the community in which he dwells to help you?

Week three—second Lent

As circumcision was the mark, the seal, of the covenant between God and his people and an indication of the place an individual had in the community, the light to the nations, so at baptism we are sealed with the Holy Spirit and set apart for a new life as one of his people, a part of his body, the light of Christ to the world.

Experiential reflection

- What kind of pledge or covenant did you make (or was made on your behalf) when you were baptized?
- Was your baptism sealed with anointing and the pledge of the Holy Spirit? What do you remember about it (sights, sounds, aromas, feelings)? Did you also receive a candle? Why?
- If you were baptized as a child, did you have an opportunity to confirm your pledge when you were older? Was the seal of the Holy Spirit a part of your confirmation?
- Did the pledge that you made reflect the attitude of your heart and will?
- How well have you lived up to that covenant? Has your life been different than it would have been had you not been baptized?

Symbolic/liturgical reflection

Read and reflect on this excerpt from the church father, Ambrose, Bishop of Milan. Notice how he describes baptism as a contract.

I turn now to the sacraments and the covenant between yourself and the Lord into which you are about to enter. In business, when a man wishes to entrust his affairs to another, it is necessary for a contract to be signed between the two parties. The same is true now, when the Lord of all things is about to entrust to you affairs that are not mortal and passing away and decaying, but spiritual and heavenly. The contract is also called a pledge of faith, since we are doing nothing that can be seen but everything can be discerned by the eyes of the spirit. Meanwhile it is necessary for the contract to be signed, not with ink on paper but with the spirit in God. The words that you pronounce are inscribed in heaven, the agreement spoken by your lips remains indelibly before God (Yarnold, 158, Ambrose).

In this selection from a liturgy for the renewal of the baptismal covenant, underline the things of which baptism is a sign or seal. Circle the promises we make before God as part of the covenant of our baptism.

Sisters and brothers in Christ, our baptism is the sign and seal of our cleansing from sin, and of our being grafted into Christ. Through the birth, life, death, and resurrection of Christ, the power of sin was broken and God's kingdom entered our world.

Through our baptism we were made citizens of that kingdom and freed from the bondage of sin. Let us celebrate that freedom and redemption through the renewal of our baptism.

I ask you, therefore, once again to reject sin, to profess your faith in Christ Jesus, and to confess the faith of the church, the faith in which we were baptized.

Do you renounce evil and its power in the world, which defies God's righteousness and love? *I renounce them.*

Do you renounce the was of sin that separate you from the love of God? *I renounce them.*

Do you turn to Jesus Christ and accept him as Lord and Savior? *I do.*

Do you intend to be Christ's faithful disciple, obeying his word and showing his love, to your life's end? *I do.* (Webber, VI, 201)

- Do you think God has lived up to his part of the covenant made on his behalf by the church at your baptism?
- In what ways have you noticed the changes promised in the covenant of baptism: freedom from the bondage of sin, belonging to the body of Christ and his kingdom?
- How well have you been living up to your part of the covenant made with God through your baptism?

Scriptural reflection

Colossians 2.8-15 (Genesis 17.1-14; Deuteronomy 10.12-22)

- What does the mark of circumcision mean as it relates to the status given to and the behavior expected of God's people?
- What does it mean to think of baptism as a permanent mark of your new life, like circumcision?
- What does it mean to think of baptism and our salvation in such physical terms? Does it change the way you think about living the new life Paul talks about? How?

Ephesians 1.3-14 (4.30)

- What is "the pledge of our inheritance toward redemption" with which we are marked by the Holy Spirit in baptism?
- What is the nature of the covenant of which the mark of the Holy Spirit is the seal? What does God promise, what is our part?

1 Corinthians 12.12-13.13

- Consider what Paul writes about being a part of God's covenant people (the body of Christ). What responsibilities do we have? What benefits do we gain?
- How does our love for one another, as Paul describes it, parallel the covenant relationship we make with God and the commitments it represents?

Synthesis

- Talk to God about the covenant made with him through your baptism. What ways is his Spirit leading you to better fulfill that covenant?
- What ways can you express your commitment to Christ and your love for him and his people in the body of Christ?
- How does the mark of the Holy Spirit go with you into the world? How can you follow through with your covenant to him and his people in daily life?
- Express your gratitude to God for what he has promised and what he is doing in your life, the church, and the world as he fulfills his covenant with you.

Week four—third Lent

In baptism, we die beneath the waters of chaos, the flood of judgment and the powers of the world that overwhelm us, only to be raised to new life in Christ. We are saved from the depths of sin and death as the pattern of life and death is overturned, for through death, we find life.

Experiential reflection

- Can you remember what your life was like before you were baptized? If you were baptized as a young child, can you remember what life was like for others you know who became Christians later in life?
- What kinds of things overwhelm you in life even now? What darkness in life is most hard to deal with or think about?
- What things in your life seem to enslave you and are hard to escape (habits, relationships, fears)?
- Do you notice anything different about these things since you were baptized? Are you confident that they no longer have lasting power over you, or do they still feel overwhelming?
- When you think of life in Christ, what does it look like? What have you experienced? What do you hope for?

Symbolic/liturgical reflection

As you read and reflect on this prayer of the blessing of the water at baptism, circle the words water or waters and underline what the prayer says they are or what they do.

Celebrant Dear friends, let us ask God our Father to be merciful to our brother [sister] [Name] who is asking for baptism. He has called him [her] to this hour. May he grant him [her] the riches of his light and strength to follow Christ with a courageous heart and to profess the faith of the Church. May he give him [her] the new life of the Holy Spirit whom we are about to ask to come down upon this water.

Then the celebrant turns to the font and blesses the water.

Celebrant Father, you have given us grace through sacramental signs which tells us of the wonders of your unseen power. In baptism we use your gift of water which you have made a rich symbol of the grace you give us in this sacrament. At the very dawn of creation your Spirit breathed on the waters, making them the wellspring of all holiness. The waters of the great flood you made a sign of the waters of baptism that make an end of sin and a new beginning of goodness. Through the waters of the Red Sea you led Israel out of slavery to be an image of God's holy people set free from sin by baptism. In the waters of the Jordan your Son was baptized by John and anointed with the Spirit. Your Son willed that water and blood should flow from his side as he hung upon the cross. After his resurrection he told his disciples: "Go out and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit." Father, look now with love upon your

Church and unseal for us the fountain of baptism. By the power of the Holy Spirit give to the waters of this font the grace of your Son. You created man in your likeness: cleanse him from sin in a new birth to innocence by water and the Spirit.

The celebrant touches the water with his right hand and continues.

We ask you, Father, with your Son to send the Holy Spirit upon the water of this font. May all who are buried with Christ in the death of baptism rise also with him to newness of life. We ask this through Christ our Lord. **Amen.** (Webber, VI, 164-165, from a Roman Catholic liturgy)

- How many different images of water and what it represents in baptism did you find? What are they?
- To what do the waters bring destruction and an end? What do they do that is new and good?
- Who is responsible for making the waters do what is described? What is the result for the person being baptized?

Scriptural reflection

1 Peter 3.13-4.11 (Genesis 6.12-9.17)

- Peter is describing new life in Christ and encouraging those who suffer for it. What does it look like as Peter describes it?
- What does he say the water of baptism does? What do Noah and the ark have to do with baptism?
- What phrases in these passages stand out to you when you think about what your own baptism means?

Titus 3.1-8 (Genesis 1.1-31; Psalm 77)

- How does Paul describe life before baptism?
- What does he say the water of baptism does (Paul calls it the "water of rebirth")?
- What is different as a result? Who does he say is responsible for the change?

Synthesis

- Think of someone you know who is not a Christian. What would it mean for them to be saved through the waters of baptism?
- What does your new life in Christ look like? What should it look like?
- What things that enslave you or make you fearful that should no longer be a part of your life as a result of your baptism in Christ?
- Describe these things to God and ask him to help you leave them behind, buried under the waters of your baptism.

Week five—fourth Lent

Our baptism is our entry into the mystery of Christ's sacrifice for our sins, into the life of the Spirit, and into the fullness of his body, the church, without which no one can call themselves Christian.

Experiential reflection

- Are you a member of a church community? Why or why not?
- Do you think of your church community, or any church community, as the body of Christ? What does it mean to you to be a member of the body of Christ?
- Are there any in your church who are not baptized? If so, why have they not been baptized?
- How is becoming a Christian described in your church (or by you)? Does it include baptism?

Symbolic/liturgical reflection

In this prayer of confirmation from an Syrian Orthodox baptismal liturgy, circle the things that baptism does in the life of the person and underline the changes in relationship to the Spirit and the church.

Priest Let us pray to the Lord

Choir Lord have mercy.

Priest Blessed are You, Lord God Almighty, Fountain of Blessings, Sun of Righteousness, Who made to shine forth for those in darkness a light of salvation through the manifestation of Your Only-Begotten Son and our God, granting unto us, though we are unworthy, blessed cleansing in Holy Water, and divine sanctification in the life-effecting Anointing: Who now also has been well-pleased to regenerate this Your servant newly illuminated through Water and Spirit, giving him [her] forgiveness of his [her] voluntary and in voluntary sins: do You Yourself, Sovereign Master, Compassionate King of All, bestow upon him [her] also the Seal of Your omnipotent and adorable Holy Spirit, and the Communion of the Holy Body and Most Precious Blood of Your Christ; keep him [her] in Your sanctification; confirm him [her] in the Orthodox Faith; deliver him [her] from the Evil One and all his devices; preserve his [her] soul, through Your saving fear, in purity and righteousness, that in every work and word, being acceptable before You, he [she] may become a child and heir of Your heavenly Kingdom.

For You are our God, the God of Mercy and Salvation, and to You do we send up Glory, to the Father, and to the Son, and to the Holy Spirit, both now and ever, and to the ages of ages. (Webber, VI, 158-159).

- Does this prayer associate forgiveness, cleansing, and entry into the life of the Holy Spirit with baptism?
- Does it understand baptism as entry into the worship and life of the church and the kingdom of God?
- What else does this prayer attribute to baptism?

Read this passage from Cyril of Jerusalem regarding baptism. Notice the many scriptural images on which he draws to describe what happens in baptism. Does he understand baptism as the means through which we are made like Christ and members of his body, the church?

Now that you have been “baptized into Christ” and have “put on Christ,” you have become conformed to the Son of God [Galatians 3.27; Romans 8.29]. For God “destined us to be his sons,” so he has made us like to the “glorious body of Christ” [Ephesians 1.5; Philippians 3.21]. Hence, since you “share in Christ,” it is right to call you Christs or anointed ones [Hebrews 3.14]. As God said, referring to you: “Touch not my anointed ones” [Psalms 105.15]. You have become anointed ones by receiving the sign of the Holy Spirit. (Yarnold, 81, Cyril).

Scriptural reflection

Acts 8.35-39, 10.44-48, 16.30-34, 22.12-16 (Leviticus 16. 23-28; Joel 2.28-29)

- Examine these different accounts of conversion, baptism, and receiving the Holy Spirit. How did it happen? In what order? Was anyone not baptized?
- How is baptism associated with purification from sin and the indwelling of the Holy Spirit?
- What did baptism mean for those we read about in Acts, even Paul himself?
- Do you associate your own baptism with your conversion to faith in Jesus Christ?

1 Corinthians 12.12-13; Ephesians 4.1-6 (Psalm 33)

- How does our baptism relate to how we get along with other Christians?
- Can you think of relationships you have with others that are clearly different because of your common baptism in Christ? How about any that are still a problem?
- What does it really mean to be baptized into the body of Christ? What should that look like in your life and in the lives of the other members of the body?
- What is God's vision for his people, the church? How is baptism related to becoming a part of that vision?

Synthesis

- Taking into account what you have learned this week in the presence of the Holy Spirit, what does it mean to be a member of the body of Christ?
- How does baptism relate to the unity Christ desires for his church?
- What changes when we are baptized that help us become members of the body of Christ? What special gift is associated with baptism that helps us live up to our responsibilities as members of his body (and as a body, to live up to our responsibilities to the world)?
- Can you be a member of this body without having been baptized?
- What unique gifts has God given you that have been transformed by your baptism into things the Holy Spirit can use for the body of Christ and our mission as his agents of reconciliation in the world?

Week six—fifth Lent

Baptism has always been associated with the gift of the Holy Spirit, Christ's own presence in the life of the believer and his church. Through the Spirit of Christ bestowed on his people in their baptism, Christ makes the church and shapes it into his presence for the world.

Experiential reflection

- What symbolized the coming of the Holy Spirit into your life?
- Do you see evidence of the Spirit of Christ in your life? Where, how?
- Do you see evidence of the Spirit of Christ in your church and in other Christians?
- What difference does the presence of the Holy Spirit make in how you see the world, live your life, and relate to people inside and outside the church?
- What difference does the presence of the Holy Spirit make in your church community in the way you worship, relate to one another, and engage in your mission as the presence of Christ in the world?

Symbolic/liturgical reflection

Examine the following selections from an Anglican baptismal liturgy. Find and circle the places the Holy Spirit is mentioned.

Beloved, because our Savior Christ said, "No one can enter into the kingdom of God, except he/she be regenerate and born again of Water and of the Holy Spirit;" I urge you to call upon God the Father, through our Lord Jesus Christ, that of His great mercy He will grant to [] that which by nature he/she cannot have; that he/she having been baptized with water and the Holy Spirit, and received into Christ's Church, is made a living member of that Church.

ALMIGHTY and immortal God, the help of all who need You, the helper of all who flee to You for comfort, the life of those who believe, and the resurrection of the dead; we call upon You for [], that he/she, coming to your holy Baptism may receive forgiveness of sin, by spiritual regeneration. Give your Holy Spirit to [], that he/she may be born again, and be made an heir of salvation and eternal life. Receive him/her, O Lord, as you have promised by your beloved Son, saying, "Ask, and you shall receive; seek, and you shall find; knock, and the door shall be opened to you." So now grant what we ask; let us who seek, find; open the gate unto us who knock; that [] may enjoy the everlasting blessing of your heavenly washing, and may come to the eternal kingdom which you have promised through Christ our Lord. Amen.

[], you have come desiring to receive Holy Baptism. We have prayed that our Lord Jesus Christ would surely receive you, release you from sin, sanctify you with the Holy Spirit, and give you the kingdom of heaven, and everlasting life.

...

O Merciful God, grant that as Christ died and rose again, so [] may die to sin and rise to new life. **Amen.**

Grant that all sinful desires may die in him/her, and that all things belonging to the Spirit may live and grow in him/her. **Amen.**

Grant that he/she may have power and strength to have victory, and to triumph, against the devil, the world, and the flesh. **Amen.**

Grant that whoever is here dedicated to you, may also be given heavenly virtues, and be rewarded forever through your mercy, Lord God, who lives, and governs all things, world without end. **Amen.**

...

We give you thanks, most merciful Father, that it has pleased you to regenerate [] with your Holy Spirit, to receive him/her for your own child, and to incorporate him/her into your Church. And humbly we ask you, that he/she, being dead to sin, may live to righteousness, and being buried with Christ in his death, may also be raised in his resurrection; so that finally, with your Church, he/she may be an inheritor of your everlasting kingdom; through Christ our Lord. Amen

- What does this liturgy say about what the Holy Spirit is doing?
- What does it say about how we are changed?
- Does it say anything about what we should do now that we are baptized?

Scriptural reflection

John 3.1-15; 22-36, then 16-21 (Ezekiel 7.1-14)

- This passage is full: baptism, new birth, Spirit, purification, mysteries, and testimony. How does it all relate? What is hard for you to understand?
- Having been baptized, what of these mysteries begins to make sense to you?
- How could you testify to what God has done in your life?

Acts 1.1-6; 2.14-21, 37-47

- What did baptism with the Spirit mean for the disciples?
- What was their response (what did they do)?
- What was the response of the people to Peter's witness?
- What did the apostles tell them to do and say would happen?
- What did those who were baptized do?
- What pattern in all of this should apply to us?

Synthesis

- Think about what our baptism means for what God calls us to do. What difference does the presence of the Holy Spirit mean for us, for his church?
- What response to the new life in Christ in baptism does the Holy Spirit lead us to express? What does he cause us to do? What does he cause us to be?
- What things that are a part of the Christian life do we associate with the presence of the Spirit of Christ in our lives?
- What things that are a part of the life, worship, and ministry of the Church do we associate with the presence of the Spirit of Christ in his people?
- What does the Spirit want you to change, in your own life or in your church community, to reflect his presence and power?

Week seven—Palm Sunday and Holy Week

Our baptism is ultimately rooted in Christ's own baptism into a mission that brought him to death and resurrection. In our baptism, we enter into his life, which becomes our life, his passion, which becomes our passion, and into his resurrection, which becomes our new life in him.

Experiential reflection

- What kind of life did your baptism mean for you?
- Did your baptism really change the way you believed and behaved? Did it make you a part of his people (the church) and his mission in the world?
- What do you expect the future to hold as a result of your baptism into Christ?

Symbolic/liturgical reflection

Read this description of Jesus' baptism from Theodore of Mopsuestia.

Our Lord himself, before his resurrection from the dead, was seen to receive baptism at the hands of John the Baptist in the River Jordan in order to present in anticipation a sign of the baptism we were to receive by his grace. For us he was "the first-born from the dead," in St Paul's words, "that in everything he might be pre-eminent;" therefore he chose for your sake to be the first not only in the reality of the resurrection but also in sign [Colossians 1.18]...

Our Lord, then, was baptized by John, but not with John's baptism. For John's baptism was a baptism of repentance for the remission of sins, and our Lord had no need of it as he was free from all sin. He was baptized with our baptism, and presented in anticipation of it. Consequently he also received the Holy Spirit, who appeared descending in the form of a dove and "remained on him," as the evangelist says [John 1.32]. For John did not have the power to confer the Holy Spirit; he said himself: "I baptize you with water; but among you stands one whom you do not know; he will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and with fire"... [John 1.26; Matthew 3.11]. The power to confer the Holy Spirit belonged to our Lord. He gives us "the first fruits of the Spirit" now, and promises to give us the full measure at the resurrection, when our nature will be fully capable of being transformed in reality to a state of excellence [Romans 8.23]. (Yarnold, 195-196, Theodore).

- Why was Jesus baptized, according to Theodore?
- What did his baptism mean for us?

Read, meditate upon, and memorize the baptismal creed and the Lord's prayer, both of which were given to candidates for baptism in the early church to remember and recite in the last days before their baptism. What do they call the baptized to believe and do?

The Apostle's Creed

I believe in God the Father Almighty, creator of heaven and earth.

And I believe in Jesus Christ, his only Son, our Lord. He was conceived by 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 sits at the right hand of God the Father Almighty. From there he shall come to judge the living and the dead.

I 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 Lord's Prayer

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. Lead us not into temptation but deliver us from evil. For the kingdom, the power, and the glory are yours now and forever. Amen.

Scriptural reflection

Matthew 3.1-17

- What did Jesus do before he was baptized? What did he do after he was baptized?
- What did it mean for the Spirit of God to descend on Jesus?
- When are the other times God said these words about Jesus? What does it mean?

Luke 3.1-22 (Isaiah 40.1-5)

- Consider the questions asked of John when he baptized. What difference did he expect baptism to make in the lives of those baptized?
- Why is judgement associated with baptism? About what are those baptized being judged?

John 1.19-34 (Isaiah 35.1-10)

- How was Jesus different than John?
- Did Jesus have to be baptized? Why was Jesus baptized?
- What does the Spirit coming upon Jesus mean for those baptized in Jesus' name?

Mark 10.35-45

- What does being baptized into Christ mean we should be doing?
- Answer Christ's question from Mark 10.38, "Are you able to drink the cup that I drink, or be baptized with the baptism that I am baptized with?"
- What might it mean for you to drink his cup and be baptized in his baptism?

Synthesis

- Consider the way Christ lived his life as a servant for our sake—his selflessness, his compassion, his love of life, and his unwavering commitment to the Father and the kingdom. What does it mean to be baptized with his baptism?
- Consider what Jesus faced in the week leading to the cross and the cross itself—dread, anticipation, a last meal with those he loved, betrayal, abuse, scorn, and death. What does it mean to be baptized with his baptism?
- Consider the resurrection, the new body that was at first unrecognizable, and the scars, the marks that remained. What does it mean to be baptized with his baptism?
- Consider the promise, the Spirit, the church, the judgment, the new creation. What does it mean to be baptized with his baptism?

Week eight—Easter (Pascha)

Through baptism we move from death to life in the power of Christ's resurrection and take our place in the community of Christ and at his table, in celebration of his victory as Lord (eucharist, thanksgiving) and in communion with him and one another.

Experiential reflection

- Have you ever worshiped in a service, such the Easter vigil or Easter Sunday, when baptism and communion were both observed? What do you remember?
- What do the different labels mean—eucharist, communion, Lord's Supper, table? How are you used to hearing it described?
- What do we do when we celebrate eucharist? How do the other parts of the liturgy or worship relate to the eucharistic meal? How does baptism relate to eucharist?
- How often do we celebrate eucharist? What happens to us when we do?

Symbolic/liturgical reflection

Read this portion of the eucharistic prayer from an Easter liturgy.

By the baptism of his suffering, death, and resurrection, you gave birth to your church, delivered us from slavery to sin and death, and made with us a new covenant by water and the Spirit.

By your great mercy we have been born anew to a living hope through the resurrection of your Son from the dead, and to an inheritance which is imperishable, undefiled, and unfading. Once we were no people, but now we are your people, declaring your wonderful deeds in Christ, who called us out of darkness into his marvelous light. When the Lord Jesus ascended, he promised to be with us always, in the power of your Word and Holy Spirit.

...On the day you raised him from the dead he was recognized by his disciples in the breaking of the bread, and in the power of your Holy Spirit your church has continued in the breaking of the bread and the sharing of the cup. And so, in remembrance of these your mighty acts in Jesus Christ, we offer ourselves in praise and thanksgiving as a holy and living sacrifice, in union with Christ's offering for us, as we proclaim the mystery of faith. **Christ has died. Christ is risen. Christ will come again.**

Pour out your Holy Spirit on us, gathered here, and on these gifts of bread and wine. Make them be for us the body and blood of Christ, that we may be for the world the body of Christ, redeemed by his blood. By your Spirit, make us one with Christ, one with each other, and one in ministry to all the world, until Christ comes in final victory and we feast at his heavenly banquet. Through your Son Jesus Christ, with the Holy Spirit in your holy church all honor and glory is yours, Almighty Father, now and for ever. Amen (Hickman, Saliers, Stooky, and White, pp. 199-200).

- What is the point of our baptism as it is described in this prayer?
- What is the point of our feast at Christ's table?
- What does the Holy Spirit do at the feast of the baptized, of the church?
- What does the Spirit make the church become and do?

Read this brief passage from John Chrysostom as he describes newly baptized Christians in the 4th Century as they joined the church in worship on Easter Sunday.

The ceremonies that follow [their baptism] are well able to teach us the afflictions from which those who have been counted worthy to receive this sacred rite have been set free and the blessings which they have been granted. As soon as they come up from those sacred waters all present embrace them, greet them, kiss them, congratulate and rejoice with them, because those who before were slaves and prisoners have all at once become free men and sons who are invited to the royal table. For as soon as they come up from the font, they are led to the awesome table which is laden with all good things. They taste the body and blood of the Lord and become the dwelling place of the Spirit; since they have put on Christ, they go about appearing everywhere like angels on earth and shining as brightly as the rays of the sun (Yarnold, P. 162, Chrysostom).

- What do the newly baptized do, according to Chrysostom? What do they become?
- What do the others who are already in the church do with the newly baptized?

Scriptural reflection

Colossians 3.1-17

- To what kind of life does Paul call the baptized who "have been raised with Christ?"
- How does that life take shape inside the community of Christ, his body, his church? How is it related to worship?

Luke 24.13-35

Look for a pattern related to eucharistic worship.

- What was going on between the stranger and the disciples of Jesus?
- What roles did they play (host, server, served, teacher, learner, friend, stranger)? How did they change?
- What is significant about how Jesus was recognized?
- How did the two respond? What did they do?

Colossians 1.15-29

- What relationship does the church have to Christ according to Paul?
- What is the mystery Paul is describing? How is it made known to the church?
- What is the church to do with this mystery? What is Paul's own example to us?

Synthesis

- What does your baptism mean for the church as the body of Christ?
- What is the life and worship of all those who are raised with Christ in baptism to look like? What does it mean for that worship to be eucharistic?
- Do you recognize Christ in eucharist, in the sharing of the word, the breaking of the bread, and the drinking of the wine?
- How does the mystery of Christ's presence in his church, most poignantly known at his table, shape the church for its purpose and mission?
- What does eucharist really mean in your life as a baptized Christian?

Week nine—second Easter (the octave)

Eucharist, the meal of thanksgiving, is at once a celebration of the resurrection, participation in the sacrifice of Christ on the cross, and the feast of unity in the body of Christ in which the church, together with the living Christ, is made one.

Experiential reflection

Find a copy of the service or liturgy in which you last celebrated eucharist or participated in communion or the Lord's Supper.

- What did you say and do as you participated?
- What images are present in the prayers and words that were spoken, the songs that were sung (thanksgiving, confession, unity, celebration, mourning, sacrifice, salvation, remembrance...)?
- What did you think and feel as you participated? What was your focus—yourself, God, others who celebrated with you?

Symbolic/liturgical reflection

Make a list of the symbols and actions from worship when eucharist is celebrated (children can draw them). Some possible symbols/symbolic actions to consider: bread; wine; one cup, one loaf; lit candles; table; stole; offering; scriptures read; sermon; holding cup; breaking bread; water poured into the wine; confession; sanctus; anaphora; epiclesis; Agnus Dei; mystery of faith; bowing; sign of the cross; eating; drinking.

- What kinds of symbols are being used? What do they mean?
- What kinds of movements/actions take place, what do they mean?
- What about the vestments of the priest, the vessels, the arrangement of the sanctuary—do they tell us anything? Do they communicate anything to God?

Read this excerpt from Theodore of Mopsuestia's description of the eucharistic preparation (the *Sursum Corda*) and the presence and blessing of the Holy Spirit (the *Epiclesis*). Underline the portions that highlight thanksgiving and circle those that mention the unity of the church.

After the blessing the bishop prepares the people for what is to come with the words: "*Lift up your hearts.*" ...The people reply: "*To you, O Lord,*" thus professing their willingness to comply. When the bishop has duly prepared the congregation's minds and hearts in this way, he says: "*Let us give thanks to the Lord.*" We owe our thanks to God, the source of all these favours, especially for these things which were done for us and which we are about to commemorate in the liturgy.

...Then, when we are all standing in silence and profound awe, the bishop proceeds to offer up the offering and immolate the sacrifice on behalf of the community. He is filled with awe, both for himself and for us because the Lord suffered death for us all, a death which will be commemorated in this sacrifice. At this moment the bishop is the tongue of all the Church, and in the liturgy he speaks the appropriate words, words of praise of God, acknowledging that all praise and glory is due to God, and that it is right for us all to pay him adoration and worship, especially by his memorial of the grace which has been given to us and which is beyond the comprehension of mere creatures.

...The bishop also prays that the grace of the Holy Spirit may come upon the whole assembly. The new birth has made them grow into a single body; now they are to be firmly established in the one body by sharing the body of our Lord, and form a single unity in harmony, peace and good works. Thus we shall look upon God with a pure heart; we shall not incur punishment by communicating in the Holy Spirit when we are divided in our views, inclined to arguments, quarrels, envy and jealousy, and contemptuous of virtue. By our harmony, peace and good works, and by the purity of heart with which our soul looks upon God, we shall show that we are awaiting to receive the Holy Spirit. In this way, by communion in the blessed mysteries, we shall be united among ourselves to be, and through whom we 'become partakers of the divine nature' [2 Peter 1.4] (Yarnold, pp. 228-229, 234, Theodore).

- For what does the church offer thanksgiving and praise in its eucharistic celebration?
- To what does Theodore attribute the unity of the church?
- What relationship do thanksgiving and unity have with the celebration and communion that are a part of eucharist?

Scriptural reflection

Acts 20.7-12; Acts 27.27-38

- Consider the New Testament "code" for eucharist: "breaking of bread." In what context is it done in these passages?
- Is thanksgiving and gladness associated with the breaking of bread?

1 Corinthians 10.1-33 (Exodus 12.1-28, 16.1-17.7)

- What is really at stake in these warnings from Paul about eucharist in the church?
- What does Paul's focus on unity with Christ and one another say about why and how we celebrate eucharist?

1 Corinthians 11.17-34

- What does Paul say about the Eucharist in this passages?
- What seems to be the focus of participating in communion?
- Consider the language about divisions, factions, and discerning the body. What does our unity in this special act of worship say to those who witness it?

Synthesis

- What conclusions have you drawn from the scriptures and reflection on the eucharistic celebration about its importance for the church?
- Reflect for a moment on what you know about the many factions within the Christian church today (Catholic, Orthodox, Anglican, Lutheran, Baptist, and many, many more)—how do you view those divisions in light of the unity in the body of Christ emphasized by Paul as he described eucharist?
- What does it mean to discern the body in the presence of the Holy Spirit in communion, the central action in the eucharistic celebration?
- For what should the church be offering thanksgiving in this sacramental action?

Week ten—third Easter

In the abundance of his grace and mercy, Christ offers himself in the feast at his table, blessing and multiplying the benefits of the gifts given for the nourishment of his people, and through the sacrifice of our gift of ourselves, purifying his church for fellowship with God and the work of his kingdom.

Experiential reflection

- Where do you look for the abundance of Christ? Where have you found it? Where have failed to find it?
- Have you made significant sacrifices for God without concern for what you receive in return? How has he prepared you to make them? Has he blessed you anyway?
- Do you associate blessing and abundance with Christ and his own sacrifice that we remember at his table?

Symbolic/liturgical reflection

Read this litany of preparation from the eucharistic prayer used at the 1982 gathering of the World Council of Churches. List the ways the symbols of the bread and wine are expected to become the abundant gifts of Christ and his kingdom. What is our participation in this feast to prepare us to be and do?

Blessed are you, Lord God of the universe, you are the giver of this bread, fruit of the earth and of human labor, let it become the bread of life. **Blessed be God, now and for ever!**

Blessed are you, Lord God of the universe, you are the giver of this wine, fruit of the vine and of human labor, let it become the wine of the eternal Kingdom. **Blessed be God, now and for ever!**

As the grain once scattered in the fields and the grapes once dispersed on the hillside are now reunited on this table in bread and wine, so, Lord, may your whole Church soon be gathered together from the corners of the earth into your Kingdom. **Maranatha! Come Lord Jesus!**

...O Lord our God, we give you thanks for uniting us by baptism in the body of Christ and for filling us with joy in the Eucharist. Lead us towards the full visible unity of your church and help us to treasure all the signs of reconciliation you have granted us. Now that we have tasted of the banquet you have prepared for us in the world to come, may we all one day share together the inheritance of the saints in the life of your heavenly city, through Jesus Christ, your Son, our Lord, who lives and reigns with you in the unity of the Holy Spirit, ever one God, world without end. **Amen.** (Webber, pp. 254, 256)

Read this selection from the mystagogical sermons of Ambrose, bishop of Milan. Notice the connection between the abundant blessing of God in the psalm and the church's eucharistic worship. What does it do for those who join him in the feast?

How often have you listened to the [Twenty-third] Psalm without understanding it? See how fittingly it is applied to the heavenly sacraments. 'The Lord feeds me. I want for nothing. He has led me to a place of refreshment. He has brought me to the waters which refresh me, he has revived my spirit. He has led me by the

paths of justice, for his name's sake. Though I should walk in the midst of death's shadow, I shall fear no evil, because you are with me. Your rod and staff have comforted me' [Psalm 23.1-4, LXX]. The rod is his sovereign right, the staff his suffering; Christ's everlasting godhead, but his bodily suffering as well. With the one he created, with the other he redeemed. 'You have prepared a meal for me, in the sight of those who afflict me. You have anointed my head with perfume. And your cup which inebriates, how glorious it is' [Psalm 23. 5, LXX].

You have come to the altar, you have received the grace of Christ, you have taken the heavenly sacraments. The Church rejoices in the redemption of so many, and is exultant with spiritual gladness when she sees at her side his family clothed in white. You can find this in the Song of Songs. With joy she invites Christ, because she has prepared a banquet which seems fit for a heavenly feast. So she says, 'Let my brother come down into his garden and pluck the fruit from his trees' [Song of Songs 4.16, LXX]. What are those fruit trees? You are the tree which, in Adam, lost its sap; but now, through the grace of Christ, you have come to fruitfulness like orchard trees.

The Lord Jesus has willingly accepted the invitation, and in his heavenly graciousness has answered the Church: 'I have come down into my garden: I have gathered a vintage of myrrh with my perfumes. I have eaten honey with my bread, and I have drunk wine with my milk. Eat brothers,' he says, 'and drink deep' [Song of Songs 5.1, LXX]. (Yarnold, pp. 143-144, Ambrose)

Scriptural reflection

John 2.1-11 (Num. 8.5-13; Joel 2.23-24)

- Why was Jesus reluctant to do what his mother requested? Why did he give in?
- What did it mean for him to use water and the jars of purification? What did it mean for him to provide the best wine, better than anything previously served?
- What did this miracle of provision at the beginning of Jesus' ministry say about who he was and what he came to do? What does it have to do with eucharist?

John 6.1-14 (2 Kings 4.38-44; Psalm 23), then read the rest of John 6 (15-71)

- What were the people looking for when they followed Jesus? What were they given?
- How did Jesus deal with the crowd who came looking for more from him?
- With what did he connect the feeding of the crowd? Why was it offensive for many to hear? What was their reaction? Why did Peter and a few others remain?
- What did Jesus' provision to the crowd have to do with eucharist, the feast of the church and the kingdom? What does it mean for him to be the bread of life?

Synthesis

- Where should we be looking for the abundance of Christ? Will everyone be receptive to it? What does it mean for those who are receptive?
- What should you be prepared to do to become a part of the abundance he provides in his grace and mercy to those who seek him?
- What does it mean for the church to approach eucharist as a feast on the abundance of Christ and to become itself the abundance of Christ for the world?

Week eleven—fourth Easter

Eucharist is a feast of God's presence with his people in which we share in the abundance he has provided which we have made into bread and wine. It is the feast of the Lamb, a foretaste of the new creation and the kingdom fulfilled at which we will feast at the wedding banquet of Christ.

Experiential reflection

- Have you, in your experience of eucharist, understood it as participation in worship that is also happening even now at the throne of Christ? What parts of the liturgy reinforce that idea?
- Do you associate the bread and wine with gifts, made of human labor with the fruit of the earth that God provides (grain, grapes)? What happens to those gifts? How do they feed the people of God beyond the simple portions (a bite and a sip) that are ingested?
- What kinds of things are done with the bread and wine that emphasize them as gifts and as food at a banquet or feast?

Symbolic/liturgical reflection

Read this portion of a eucharistic prayer from the Church of England.

Send your Spirit on us now that by these gifts we may feed on Christ with opened eyes and hearts on fire. May we and all who share this food offer ourselves to live for you and be welcomed at your feast in heaven where all creation worships you, Father, Son and Holy Spirit:

Blessing and honour and glory and power be yours for ever and ever. Amen.

(New Patterns of Worship, Eucharistic Prayer D, p. 195)

- Is the welcome at the feast to which it refers something anticipated now or for the future?

Notice this very forward-looking series of eucharistic prayers from the Teaching of the Twelve Apostles (the Didache) that recent scholarship dates to the middle of the first century (about the same time the gospels in the New Testament were written).

(And) concerning the eucharist, eucharistize thus:

First, concerning the cup: We give you thanks, our Father, for the holy vine of your servant David which you have revealed to us through your servant Jesus. To you [is] the glory forever.

And concerning the broken [loaf]: We give you thanks our Father, for the life and knowledge which you have revealed to us through your servant Jesus. To you [is] the glory forever. Just as this broken [loaf] was scattered over the hills [as grain], and, having been gathered together, became one; in like fashion, may your church be gathered together from the ends of the earth into your kingdom. Because yours is the glory and the power through Jesus Christ forever.

...And after being filled [by the meal], eucharistize thus:

We give you thanks, holy Father, for your holy name, which you tabernacle in our hearts, and for the knowledge and faith and immortality which you have

revealed to us through your servant Jesus. To you [is] the glory forever.

You, almighty Master, created all things for the sake of your name, both food and drink you have given to people for enjoyment in order that they might give you thanks; to us, on the other hand, you have graciously bestowed Spirit-sent food and drink for life forever through your servant [Jesus].

Before all [these] things we give you thanks because you are powerful [on our behalf]. To you [is] the glory forever.

Remember, Lord, your church, to save [her] from every evil and to perfect [her] in your love and to gather [her] together from the four winds [as] the sanctified into your kingdom which you have prepared for her, because yours is the power and the glory forever.

Come, grace [of the kingdom]! and pass away, [oh] this world! Hosanna to the God of David! If anyone is holy, come! If anyone is not, convert! Come Lord [maran atha]! Amen! (Didache 9.1-4; 10.1-6, Milavec, p. 23, 25)

- How does it describe the kingdom of God?
- How about the food and drink—where does it come from, and for how long?
- What is the hope and destiny of the church that is celebrating the meal?

Scriptural reflection

Luke 14.1-24; Luke 15.11-32; Matthew 22.1-4

- What is it that characterizes both the banquets and the guests both invited and honored in these parables?
- What is true about those who do not celebrate these 'parties' of the kingdom?

Rev. 19. 6-10; Is. 25.6-10a, 55.1-5 (Amos 9.11-15)

- How is eucharist related to the marriage supper of the Lamb?
- What kind of images are we given about the banquet of the Lord?
- How do these images relate to the way the church celebrates eucharist even now?
- Who is present in the celebration, both now and then, in the fullness of the kingdom and the new creation?

Synthesis

- How do we understand the eucharistic meal of the church even today in light of the feast in which it participates and anticipates?
 - Who is invited to the feast of the kingdom, now and in the new creation?
 - Why the celebration? What is being celebrated? Who is being celebrated?
 - What is being served to those who are invited? What is the quality of the meal? Is it enough to fill and to satisfy?
- What does the feast of the kingdom mean for the world?
- What does the feast of the kingdom mean for the church?
- What does the feast for the kingdom mean for you?

Week twelve—fifth Easter

Like the last supper of Christ with his disciples, eucharist is our entry into the redemptive reality and mission of Christ in the world and into the new life lived in and through the presence of his Holy Spirit, a daily victory of Christ's resurrection and recreation moving toward the ultimate reality of the kingdom of God.

Experiential reflection

- Have your experiences with eucharist impacted you in some way? How?
- Have you been aware of God's presence? How?
- If so, how did he change you? In what ways have you left trying to be different than when you came? For what purpose did he change you?

Symbolic/liturgical reflection

Read this description of the change in us as we partake of the bread and wine by Theodore of Mopsuestia.

All alike have the right to communicate; but a person receives more, if by living in love, faith and virtue he shows himself to be worthy of receiving—insofar as one can do so, for clearly no one can be truly worthy. For how could a mortal man, subject to corruption and sin, show himself to be worthy of receiving this body which has become immortal and incorruptible, and now in heaven at God's right hand is universally honoured as Lord and King? But we place our confidence in our Lord's mercy, who gave us these gifts. We come forward with all the fervour and attention we can muster, in order to do so as worthily as human nature permits. With these hopes we all approach Christ our Lord. He gave us a new birth in holy baptism and made us his own body, his own flesh, his offspring—'Here am I, and the children God has given me' [Hebrews 2.13 quoting Isaiah 8.18 LXX]—and with a love like that of a natural mother he devised a way to feed us with his own body. To use other symbols, he set the bread and the chalice before us, and they are his body and blood, by which we eat the food of immortality while the grace of the Holy Spirit flows down on us, feeding us and so making us immortal and imperishable in hope; by means of them, in a way that is beyond description, he leads us to share in the blessings that are to come, when we are fed by the grace of the Holy Spirit in simple fact, without sacraments and signs, and so become by nature completely free from death, corruption, and change. (Yarnold, 240-241, Theodore)

- What is the change that is made in us as we are fed by Christ?
- Who affects this change, and who are we becoming like?

Examine the following prayer and dismissal from a eucharistic liturgy for Epiphany.

Now you have given yourself to us, Lord. **Now we give ourselves for others.**

Your love has made us a new people; **As a people of love we will serve you with joy.**

Your glory has filled our hearts. **Help us to glorify you in all things. Amen.**

Now may our Lord Jesus Christ himself, and God our Father who loves us and gives everlasting hope through grace, comfort your hearts and establish them in every good work and word; and the blessing of God almighty, the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, be among you and remain with you always. **Amen.**

Go in peace to love and serve the Lord. **Amen! Thanks be to God!**

(Hickman, Saliers, Stooky, and White, pp. 88-89)

- In what ways does it describe the transformation we undergo as we meet Christ and feast with him at his table?
- What are we supposed to become as a result of our communion with Christ? What are we supposed to do?

Scriptural reflection

Luke 22.7-30

- What was the last Passover meal for Christ as he celebrated with his disciples? What did it prepare him to do?
- What did it mean for his disciples? What was he preparing them to do?

Mark 14.12-25; Matt. 26.17-30 (Exodus 12.1-20)

- What strikes you about these accounts of the last supper from Mark and Matthew? How are they similar or different?
- What does this language of covenant and blood mean? What about the reference to drinking in the kingdom of God?
- What do the things Christ said and did with his disciples at the Passover meal tell us about the mission for which he was preparing himself and them?

John 13.1-30 (Is. 42.1-9)

- Why would John include this story of footwashing in place of the last supper?
- What themes are similar to those we associate with Eucharist?
- What does it imply about our relationship with Christ, with others in the church, with the world?

Synthesis

- What does it mean to be united with Christ?
- What was his mission? How did he accomplish it?
- What is his mission now? How is he accomplishing it?
- What does it mean for us to be his body? What role do we have to play in his mission?
- How does the eucharist make us his body? How does it prepare us for our role?

Think about what it means to be united with Christ—in his suffering, in his death, in his resurrection, in his victory and lordship. What does it mean for us, as his church, to be his body, his presence in the world? What can and should we bring from his table to the world?

Week thirteen—sixth Easter

At the heart of eucharist is our communion with Christ in which we enter fully into his life, his passion, his death, his resurrection, his promise, and his own communion with the Father in the Spirit, as his beloved disciples and friends, a people shaped by his love for us and our love for one another.

Experiential reflection

- Make a list of your closest friends, those for whom you would give or do anything.
 - Does your list include other members of the body of Christ? If not, why not?
 - Why would you do anything for the people on your list? On what basis would you make sacrifices for them? Are there limits to what you would give or do?
- Do you have a sense of union with Christ, with the Father, and the Spirit in eucharist?
- How does your unity with Christ extend to unity with those who share with you at his table, who with you hear his word and listen to his voice?
- Does your unity with and in Christ change you in any way? Does it prepare you for the self-giving life of friendship in Christ?

Symbolic/liturgical reflection

Consider these reflections from two modern mystagogues, Henry Nouwen and Alexander Schmemmann. Circle or make a list of significant words, especially those that stand out to you. Write a brief statement for each about what they mean for you and others who gather in the presence of Christ at his table.

In the Eucharist, Jesus gives all. The bread is not simply a sign of his desire to become our food; the cup is not just a sign of his willingness to be our drink. Bread and wine *become* his body and blood in the giving. The bread, indeed, is his body given for us; the wine his blood poured out for us. As God becomes fully present for us in Jesus, so Jesus is fully present to us in the bread and the wine of the Eucharist. ...God does not hold back; God gives all. That is the mystery of the Incarnation. That too is the mystery of the Eucharist. Incarnation and Eucharist are the two expressions of the immense, self-giving love of God. And so the sacrifice of the cross and the sacrifice at the table are one sacrifice, one complete, divine self-giving that reaches out to all humanity in time and space.

The word that best expresses this mystery of God's total self-giving love is "communion." It is the word that contains the truth that, in and through Jesus, God wants, not only to teach us, instruct us, inspire us, but to become one with us. God desires to be fully united with us so that all of God and all of us can be bound together in a lasting love. (Nouwen, *With Burning Hearts: A Meditation on the Eucharistic Life*, pp. 84-86)

The Cherubim Hymn, the censing of the Altar and congregation, and the transfer of the eucharistic elements to the Altar (Great Entrance) constitute the first essential "movement" of the Eucharist: the *Offertory*, which is the sacrificial act of the Church offering to God the oblation of our lives. We speak very often of the sacrifice of Christ, but so easily forget that the sacrifice of Christ requests

and implies our own sacrifice, or rather our "uniting ourselves" to the sacrifice of Christ, for we are His Body and the partakers of His Life. A sacrifice is the natural movement of love, which is the gift of oneself, a self-denial for the sake of the Other. When I love somebody my life is *in* him whom I love, I give him my life—freely, willingly, joyfully—and this "giving away" becomes the very meaning of my life.

The mystery of the Holy Trinity is the mystery of the perfect and absolute sacrifice because it is the mystery of Absolute Love. God is Trinity because God is Love. The whole of the Father's Essence is eternally "given away" to the Son, and the whole of the Son's Life is in having the Essence of the Father as His Own, to exist as the Perfect Image of the Father; and, finally, this mutual sacrifice of perfect love, the eternal Gift of the Father to the Son, is the very Spirit of God—Spirit of Life, of Love, of Perfection, of Beauty, of the whole inexhaustible depth of Divine Essence. The mystery of the Trinity is essential for the proper understanding of the Eucharist, and first of all, of its sacrificial character. God so *loved* the world that He gave (sacrificed) His Son to us, to bring us back to Himself. The Son of God so *loved* His Father that He gave Himself to Him. His whole life was a perfect, an absolute sacrificial movement. He performed it as God-Man, not only in His Divinity, but also in his Humanity, which He assumed out of Divine Love for us. In Himself He thus restored human life to perfection, as a *sacrifice of love to God*, a sacrifice not of fear, not of any kind of "interest," but of love and love alone. And finally, this perfect life as love, and therefore as sacrifice, He gave to all who accept Him and believe in Him, restoring in them the initial relationship with God. The life of the Church, being His life in us and our life in Him, thus is necessarily a *sacrificial life*, and eternal movement of love towards God. The essential attitude and the essential act of the Church, which is the new Humanity restored by Christ, is, therefore, the *Eucharist*, the act of Love, Thanksgiving and Sacrifice. (Schmemmann, *Liturgy and Life*, pp. 49-50)

Scriptural reflection

John 14–John 17 (as if Jesus is talking to you, after you've shared bread and wine with him)

- What is Jesus trying to offer the disciples in these words following his last meal with them? What themes keep showing up?
- Do the action words you found above also appear in this conversation and prayer?
- What is he preparing his disciples (and us) for? What does Jesus say about the fact that we are one with him and the Father (what will happen to us)?
- Write down John 17.22-23. How should this prayer be understood in light of the fact that Jesus prays it in the garden the night before his death on the cross?

Synthesis

- How does eucharist make us one, in communion with God and one another?
- What is the purpose of our unity with Christ and one another? How is it shown in our actions, in our lives?
- How can you abide in Christ and live a self-giving life of love for him, others, and the world? What will give you the grace and strength to do so?

Week fourteen—seventh Easter

Our communion with Christ in celebration of eucharist transforms, nourishes, and empowers us. It draws us into Christ's own death and resurrection and makes us his body, redeemed by his blood to be the very presence of his kingdom in the world. But eucharist also asks something of us, and as the heart of the church, it is also the heart of the question of our response to God, and our willingness to give all that we are to be all that he desires.

Experiential reflection

- What does it mean to abide in Christ, to be made like him? How is that happening in eucharist?
- In worship at Christ's table, what makes you remember Christ's self-giving? What does it mean for you? What does it ask of you?
- Have you ever considered eucharist as something that makes demand of you? Are those demands too much?

Symbolic/liturgical reflection

Consider this glimpse from Paul into the worship of the New Testament church.

For I received from the Lord what I also handed on to you, that the Lord Jesus on the night when he was betrayed took a loaf of bread, and when he had given thanks, he broke it and said, "This is my body that is for you. Do this in remembrance of me." In the same way he took the cup also, after supper, saying, "This cup is the new covenant in my blood. Do this, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of me." For as often as you eat this bread and drink the cup, you proclaim the LORD's death until he comes. (1 Corinthians 11.23-26, NRSV)

- Even with all that surrounds this simple, direct statement about the nature of eucharist, what does this central statement that we repeat at the center of eucharist, ask us to do—what does it mean to "do this in remembrance of me?"
- What does it mean for the cup to be a new covenant in blood? What does covenant require of us? With whom are we making covenant?
- What does it mean to proclaim the Lord's death until he comes? How do we do that by eating bread and drinking wine? To whom are we proclaiming his death? Why?

Notice how Cyril of Jerusalem works with Paul's eucharistic description.

This teaching of the blessed Paul is in itself sufficient to assure you fully on the divine mysteries, through being accounted worthy of which you are now 'of the same body' and blood of Christ [1 Cor. 11.23ff]. ...Since, then, Christ himself clearly described the bread to us in the words, 'This is my body,' who will dare henceforward dispute it? And since he has emphatically said, 'This is my blood,' who will waver in the slightest and say it is not his blood?

By his own power on a previous occasion he turned the water into wine at Cana in Galilee; so it is surely credible that he has changed wine into blood. If he performed that wonderful miracle just because he had been invited to a human marriage, we shall certainly be much more willing to admit that he has conferred on the wedding-guests the savouring of his body and blood.

So let us partake with the fullest confidence that it is the body and blood of Christ. For his body has been bestowed on you in the form of bread, and his blood in the form of wine, so that by partaking of Christ's body and blood you may share with him the same body and blood. This is how we become the bearers of Christ, since his body and blood spreads throughout our limbs; this is how, in the blessed Peter's words, 'we become partakers in the divine nature.'

Christ once said in conversation with the Jews: 'Unless you eat my flesh and drink my blood, you have no life in you' [John 6.53]. They were scandalised because they did not interpret his words spiritually; they retreated from his presence, thinking he was exhorting them to cannibalism.

...Do not, then, regard the bread and wine as nothing but bread and wine, for they are the body and blood of Christ as the Master himself has proclaimed. Though your senses suggest this to you, let faith reassure you. (Yarnold, 86-87, Cyril)

- What does it mean that are "now 'of the same body' and blood of Christ" and that we are "partakers in the divine nature?" What demands does this make of us?

Scriptural reflection

John 6.22-71 (Ps. 22)

- Why are these words difficult to hear (for the Jews and for the disciples)?
- What did everyone just witness before Jesus made these comments?
- How does Jesus relate the abundance of the loaves and fish with manna and then to his body and blood?
- What does he say about his relationship to those who eat his flesh and drink his blood? Why does he give of himself this way?
- How do the people react (the Jews and the disciples)? Why do a few remain?

Mark 10.32-44

- As we return to this passage that we examined in our reflections on baptism, what do you think it means to drink the cup that Jesus drank?
- What does Jesus mean when he tells his disciples that they will, indeed, drink it?
- What will characterize their lives as they do? For whom will they give themselves as Christ gave himself?

Synthesis

- What does Christ give us when we eat his flesh and drink his blood at his table?
- What does Christ ask of us when we eat his flesh and drink his blood at his table?
- Consider the way Christ gave himself for us, body and blood, a servant of all and a ransom for many—his selflessness, his compassion, his love of life, and his unwavering commitment to the Father and the kingdom. What does it mean to drink the cup he drank?
- Consider the resurrection, the new body and the scars that remained, reminders of his sacrifice and of his promise. What does it mean to drink the cup he drank?
- Consider this world, its alienation from God the Father, the needs of the lost and the oppressed, the many things other than Christ to whom people turn. What does it mean to drink the cup he drank?

Week fifteen—Pentecost

In eucharist is fulfilled the work begun in baptism as the Spirit of Christ, present with his people, unites, nourishes, transforms, and commissions the body of Christ and sends us out in his power to be the sacrament of his kingdom, his body broken and blood poured out for many, for the forgiveness of sins and for reconciliation with God our Father, our creator, and Lord.

Experiential reflection

Reflect on this study and your experience in worship, in word and at the table of Christ, in thanksgiving and communion (eucharist).

- What are you being prepared and have you been prepared to do?
- How does your preparation and purpose find its place in the preparation and purpose of the church in the world? What does that mean for you now?

Symbolic/liturgical reflection

Read this encompassing reflection on eucharist and mission by Alexander Schmemmann.

For if, on the one hand, nothing can be *added* to the Church—its fullness is that of Christ Himself—the manifestation and the communication of his fullness constitute, on the other hand, the very life of the Church in this “aeon.” On the day of Pentecost, when the fullness of the Church was realized once for all, the *time of the Church* began, the last and the crucial segment of the history of salvation. Ontologically [related to the very being of the Church] the only *newness* and, therefore, the only *soteriological content* [its relationship to salvation] of this segment is precisely mission: the proclamation and the communication of the eschaton [the coming of Christ and the new creation], which is already the being of the Church and indeed its only being. It is the Church as mission that gives to this time its real significance and to history its meaning. And it is mission that gives the human response in the Church its validity, makes us real co-workers in the work of Christ.

Nothing reveals better the relation between the Church as fullness and the Church as mission than the Eucharist, the central act of the Church’s *leitourgia* [worship—literally, the work of the Church in worship], the sacrament of the Church itself. There are two complimentary movements in the eucharistic rite: *the movement of ascension* and *the movement of return*. The Eucharist begins as an ascension toward the throne of God, toward the Kingdom. “Let us now lay aside all earthly cares,” says the offertory hymn, and we prepare ourselves to ascend into heaven with Christ and in Christ, and to offer in Him—His Eucharist. This first movement, which finds its fulfillment in the consecration of the elements, the sign of the acceptance by God of our Eucharist, is, to be sure, already an act of mission. The Eucharist is offered “on behalf of all and for all,” it is the fulfillment by the Church of its priestly function: the reconciliation of the whole creation with God, the sacrifice of the whole world to God, the intercession for the whole world before God. All this *in Christ*, the God-man,

the unique priest of the new creation, the “one who offers and the one who is offered... ” ...And then, precisely at the moment when this state of fullness has been reached and consummated at the table of the Lord in His Kingdom, when “we have seen the true light and partaken of the heavenly Spirit,” the second movement begins—that of *return into the world*. “Let us depart in peace,” says the celebrant as he leaves the altar and leads the congregation outside the temple—and this is the last, the ultimate, commandment. The Eucharist is always the End, the *parousia* [the final and eternal presence of Christ], and yet it is always the *beginning*, the *starting point*: now mission begins. “We have seen the true light, we have enjoyed life eternal,” but this life, this light, are given to us in order to “transform” us into Christ’s witnesses in this world. Without this ascension into the Kingdom we would have nothing to witness to. Now, having once more become “His people and His inheritance,” we can do what Christ wants us to do: “You are witnesses of these things” (Luke 24:48). The Eucharist, transforming “the Church into what it is,” transforms it into mission. (Schmemmann, *Church, World, Mission*, 214-215)

- What in your own experience in worship, especially eucharistic worship, would you associate with “the movement of ascension” toward the Kingdom?
- What in that same experience in worship would you associate with the “return to the world” in mission?
- What truly is our mission in the world as the church that lives in anticipation of the fulfillment of the Kingdom of God?

Scriptural reflection

Read and reflect on these passages of scripture. Keep a running list of all the things that are given by Christ or asked of his people by Christ and his apostles as a result of his death and resurrection, that which we remember, celebrate, and in which we participate in eucharist. If these passages call others to mind, find them, read them, and add to your list.

John 20.19-23; John 21.1-17; 1 Peter 1.1-2.10; Philippians 1.27-2.13; 2 Corinthians 5.16-6.1

- What does the presence of the living Christ through his Spirit in his church, that which is known most profoundly in our eucharistic worship, prepare us to be and do?

Synthesis

- What does eucharist mean? For you, for the church?
- What is happening when we celebrate eucharist?
- How does worship at Christ’s table change who you are?
- How does worship at Christ’s table change what you do?
- How does worship at Christ’s table change who we are and what we do as a people, as the body of Christ?
- What does it mean for the world that the church is eucharistic?