

## CHAPTER 11

# *The Great Thanksgiving*

*The people and presiding priest offer thanks (make Eucharist)*

In the Great Thanksgiving "the presiding priest gives thanks in the name of the assembly" (page 511). "The celebration of the Eucharist is the work of the whole People of God" (page 515). All present are in that sense celebrants at the Eucharist. The bishop or priest presides in the midst of the assembly and prays the Great Thanksgiving on behalf of all.

Consecrating is not a "magical" power (with "magical" words) which a priest or bishop has independently of a celebrating Christian community. Hence, in "Anglican tradition there shall be no celebration of the Eucharist unless at least one other person is present to receive communion with the presiding priest" (page 517). There were debates in the past, not wholly in jest, wondering what would occur if a priest went into a bakery and said "this is my body." Would the church have had to purchase all the loaves and reverently consume them? Those debates belong to the same past in which the words "hocus pocus" were derived from the Latin for "this is my body"! (Incidentally, at Jesus' last supper, "this is my body" and "this is my blood" were words of administration or distribution not of consecration.)

God consecrates in response to the whole Great Thanksgiving prayer (cf. 1 Timothy 4:4-5). And it is part of the art of presiding - the way the presider uses gestures and voice - which draws in the whole assembly and involves them in this sense that this prayer is being proclaimed on behalf of all. Education will also affect this, as will the design of the liturgical space, the robes worn, and so on.

Gestures in the Great Thanksgiving are *interpretive* rather than *consecratory*, and hence none are obligatory with the new texts. On the other hand, gestures which do not relate to the text will end up appearing consecratory, as does complex ceremonial which requires a lot of explanation. The interpretive value of the gestures is obviously reduced if the congregation is not watching! Certain individuals find they can be more

involved in the prayer if they follow the written text. For most, however, following in the Prayer Book gives the impression of checking to see the presider does not depart from the formula! Should a presider use a variation or addition to the Great Thanksgiving, congregational flicking of pages in search of the alteration is distracting. At most, the congregation only needs the responses. These are quickly learnt, particularly if sung. During the period that the community is learning the responses a simple announcement before the Great Thanksgiving can highlight this approach: "If you need the responses for the Great Thanksgiving they are to be found at the bottom of page 420."

With the growing familiarity with the responses to the Great Thanksgiving there will be an enriched experience of the way that the Eucharist is *action* accompanied by interpretive words. (Jesus said, "*Do* this to remember me," not "read pages 436-439 to remember me"! ) This rediscovery is realised in the community celebrating around the table and being able to watch the presider who now faces the assembly rather than hiding the eucharistic action.

A community is furthermore encouraged to respond from memory by the regular use of one Eucharistic Liturgy with one set of responses. The presider can use consistent leads, tone of voice, and gesture to cue the assembly's acclamations. (Moving from the extended hands of *orans* to joined hands is one traditional way to indicate the assembly's cue.)

A community committed to memorised acclamations and responses need not lack variety within a well known structure. Since 1984, New Zealand, along with other Anglican churches, has authorised a framework for celebrating the Eucharist (pages 511-514). This includes an enormous flexibility within the eucharistic prayer while still maintaining the possibility of using well known responses. Writing original eucharistic prayers or adapting existing ones will be explored further below.

The Great Thanksgiving is a unity; from the dialogue to the concluding doxology and great "Amen." Although in recent centuries only the "preface" and conclusion have been sung, at one time the prayer was sung in its entirety just as the Jewish table prayers were. When priests began to recite the central portion of the prayer quietly, the music dropped out. Lengthy musical settings were then written for the Latin text of the *Sanctus* ("Holy, Holy,..."). Such music would have "covered" the silent recitation by the priest of the rest of the

eucharistic prayer. A brief pause between the *Sanctus* and the *Benedictus* ("Blessed is he...") often provided the moment for the elevation of the "priest's" wafer and chalice.

With the renewed appreciation of the place of the whole assembly gathered around the altar for the Great Thanksgiving, briefer, congregational settings now replace such choir settings. There are now several acclamations in each of the Great Thanksgiving prayers (e.g. "Holy, holy,..."; "Glory to you, Lord Christ..."; "Blessing, honour and glory be yours,..."). In either singing all or saying all of the acclamations the unity of the prayer is recognised. Presiders too are increasingly singing the whole of the Great Thanksgiving. This renewal also recognises the unity of the whole of the Great Thanksgiving. Those who criticise such a practice as being alien to our culture forget how alien it is to sing *at all* in our culture! Singing or chanting prayers has not only been the norm in Jewish and Christian history, but it is continued as normal in Maori worship to this day. This musical renaissance is an invitation to musicians to provide modern settings of the whole Great Thanksgiving prayer for both presider and people.

Standing throughout the Great Thanksgiving is also a return to the ancient Jewish-Christian posture for prayer. It makes little sense to pray the words "with all who *stand* before you ... we worship you" (page 423) while kneeling! Keeping the same posture throughout the prayer again witnesses to the unity of the Great Thanksgiving. Hence, announcements such as "Let us pray" made after "Blessed is he ..." are to be avoided. An announcement made in the middle of a prayer interrupts its unity. Furthermore, "Let us pray" said in the middle of the Great Thanksgiving implies that what has occurred previously was not prayer! In any case, "Let us pray" should not be equivalent to "please kneel," as if kneeling is the only appropriate posture for Christian prayer!

The only reference in the Prayer Book to what has sometimes been called "concelebration" occurs in the "Additional Directions" to the Ordination Liturgies: "It may be appropriate for the newly ordained priests or the newly ordained bishop to be associated with the presiding priest or bishop during the Eucharist, but this should not include vocal participation in the Great Thanksgiving" (page 923). This rubric again highlights the understanding that the presider prays the Great Thanksgiving on behalf of all those present

(including bishops, priests, deacons, and laity gathered around the table) and it also underscores the unity of the Great Thanksgiving. Whatever way is chosen to involve other clergy present at a Eucharist, great care needs to be taken not to give the impression of a clerical caste. This care will include thinking about the visual arrangements as well. It is not appropriate to delegate any part of the Great Thanksgiving to a cantor.

The Prayer Book provides variations and additions to the Great Thanksgiving for various occasions. Parts of the Great Thanksgiving may also be omitted, and these are indicated by brackets (pages 430- 434).

### **Clashing symbols - Actions speak louder than words**

Our actions can contradict the intention of the texts. For example, one of the acclamations, coming directly after the institution narrative in the Great Thanksgiving, is addressed to Christ. If the presider addresses this acclamation visibly *to* the bread and wine the action has contradicted the intention of the text. Consecration does not occur by formula, certainly not by the institution narrative in the new eucharistic prayers (as the invocation of the Holy Spirit, which follows, makes clear). God consecrates in response to the whole Great Thanksgiving. Gestures need to be consistent with this insight.

In our new texts the Last Supper account is addressed neither to the bread and wine, nor to the congregation. It is an integral part of the prayer and clearly addressed to God. It is desirable that the presider's action at this point is in accordance with this. The presider is not mimicking the Last Supper during this narrative. The bread is not broken and the wine drunk at this point, for example. Furthermore, the *whole* people of God celebrates the Eucharist *in persona Christi* (in the person of Christ). The presider acts primarily *in nomine ecclesiae* (in the name of the gathered community).

Care needs to be taken that the presider's gestures for the Great Thanksgiving do not clericalise the prayer rather than encouraging the prayerful participation of all present.

Our texts assume one bread, and one cup on the table during the eucharistic prayer. If more wine is needed it could be in a clear glass pitcher,

a flagon or other vessel, placed on the table at the Preparation of the Gifts and poured into more chalices brought up after the breaking of the bread. Placing the pitcher or flagon on the table indicates the intention to consecrate this wine. Touching these vessels during the Great Thanksgiving may give inappropriate messages about how and when consecration occurs.

Last century, manual actions for the eucharistic prayer were imported into the Anglican Eucharist from the Missal of Pope Pius V. These often married poorly with the Anglican text. They are even less appropriate for our new texts. Their unsuitability is accentuated now with the presider facing the congregation (except, of course, if the congregation is not watching!)

Some ceremonial guides from overseas or from other communions need adaptation to our New Zealand Anglican texts for the eucharistic prayer. This is particularly true when their texts have a different structure to ours.

Each of the New Zealand Anglican Great Thanksgiving prayers is a single prayer. Its unity is best preserved if the presider keeps gestures ("manual acts") simple and also avoids changes in voice during the prayer.

Reading from the book at the altar can unfortunately be done in such a way that one gives the impression that one is following a recipe book. It can help to have the book lying flat or else to have a card flat on the altar. This can include the text, and any variant to the Great Thanksgiving. In this way problems arising from having to turn pages are also resolved.

### **Suggestions for gestures during the Great Thanksgiving**

Ceremonial needs to support the text and be suited to the community, surroundings, and relative importance of the occasion. Ceremonial should not highlight secondary elements at the expense of primary ones. Gestures should be graceful rather than sudden.

There are no gestures prescribed by *A New Zealand Prayer Book* for the Great Thanksgiving and so it is over to the presider to use suitable gestures with which they feel comfortable. The Jewish tradition of holding the bread and the cup throughout the prayer of thanksgiving is now appropriately chosen by some.

Others stand with hands raised in *orans* throughout. This traditional Christian stance for prayer has hands extended and raised in a human gesture of openness, praise, pleading, and offering. This simple posture is the prayer posture of all the baptised. Hence, the assembly may stand around the table also praying with their hands so raised. The presider prays aloud on their behalf.

The bread and wine do not need to be touched in the Great Thanksgiving. Breaking the bread in the institution narrative was a novelty introduced in 1662 after the universal practice of a separate fraction was lost in the Commonwealth period. The breaking of the bread has now been restored as a separate action after the eucharistic prayer. It may surprise some that Orthodox priests have never touched the bread in the eucharistic prayer.

Where ceremonial has been prescribed in *A New Zealand Prayer Book*, often the gesture is followed by a pause, and only then are the interpretive words said. In the Prayer Book, for example, the rubrics indicate that the bread is broken, the presider pauses and *then* says, "The bread we break ..." (page 471). Another example of this is that the bishop lays hands on the ordinand, pauses, and *then* says, "God of grace ..." (page 897). Presiders may wish to reflect on this principle which is followed here.

The following suggestions are for the Great Thanksgiving on pages 420-423. The principles proposed can be adapted by each presider to whichever Great Thanksgiving is used. Gestures are basically interpretive - they highlight the meaning of what is being said in the prayer and are not in themselves necessary for "validity."

**Introductory dialogue:** The presider opens the hands in greeting (as at the initial biblical greeting or at the Peace) and then says, "The Lord is here." The hands are raised for "Lift up your hearts."

The initial gesture of greeting may be resumed for "Let us give thanks..."

**The Preface:** (from the Latin, *praefatio*, meaning "proclamation" rather than "introductory") "It is right indeed, ... for ever praising you and saying:"

The presider's hands are extended in *orans*. In turning pages both hands are brought down to avoid giving the impression of fencing!

**Sanctus & Benedictus:** (Is 6:3, Ps 118:26, Mt 21:9)

The presider's hands may be joined together. This drawing in of the hands is a gesture to encourage the congregation's strong acclamation.

**Post-Sanctus:** "All glory and thanksgiving to you, holy Father;" (this is the briefest "Post-Sanctus" in our Prayer Book. Compare this, for example, with page 437, "All glory and honour ... eternal life.")

The presider continues the prayer with hands extended.

**Institution narrative:** "on the night ... as often as you drink it, to remember me."

The presider may hold the bread (or paten) a convenient height above the table throughout the words concerning the bread. For the action to precede the words, presiders may like to try lifting the bread before the beginning of the sentence, which in this case means before "All glory and ..." The cup may similarly be held throughout the words concerning it.

It may, however, be preferable not to "take" the bread and cup during the institution narrative. The "taking" is done at the Preparation of the Gifts just as the "breaking and giving" occur at the fraction and communion and these are not duplicated during the institution narrative. The presider can simply pray the institution narrative with hands extended in *orans*.

In any case, gestures such as signs of the cross, elevations, breaking the bread, bows, or genuflections have little place at this point in these revised texts. They give the impression that the character of the prayer has changed at this point and that the presider is "doing something" to the bread and wine other than giving thanks over them.

*The Epiclesis*



**Memorial Acclamation:** "Glory to you, Lord Christ; ...Come Lord Jesus."  
The presider's hands may be joined for any acclamation.

**Anamnesis:** "Therefore loving God, ... cup of salvation."  
The presider continues with hands extended in *orans*.

**Oblation:** "Accept our sacrifice ... high priest."  
The presider continues in *orans*. Alternatively, the bread and cup may be lifted in offering (cf. the doxology below.)

**Epiclesis:** "Send your Holy Spirit ... your kingdom."  
The presider may choose, in the ancient gesture associated with the epiclesis, to "impose" hands over the bread and cup. A sign of the cross over the gifts has also a long tradition that some may wish to retain at this point, crossing themselves for "that we, filled..."

The downside of these actions is that they can signify that something is happening at this moment that is not happening elsewhere in the prayer. Continuing to lead the prayer in *orans* at this point avoids this.

**Doxology:** "United in Christ ... **for ever. Amen.**"  
The bread and cup may be raised in a gesture of offering at this point. This is the *high* point of the eucharistic prayer. "Eucharist" not only refers to the whole service, and to the prayer of thanks, but originally also described the bread and cup themselves. Eucharist is offered to God. If there is a deacon assisting, the deacon, standing on the presider's right, normally elevates the cup. The elements are returned to the table after the "Amen."

As has already been noted, genuflections, elevations, bell-ringing or other acts of veneration at the time of the institution narrative are inconsistent with the theology of the Prayer Book texts. An act of reverence after the conclusion of the Great Thanksgiving, however, would be appropriate. The Prayer Book also indicates .....

*The Doxology*

"silence may be kept" at this point.

## **Writing Eucharistic Prayers**

The eucharistic prayer draws its shape from the *Birkat ha-mazon*, the long prayer over the cup of wine at the end of the Jewish meal. This meal prayer includes the request by the one presiding, "Let us give thanks to God." The community gives its assent that this one preside on their behalf, "It is right to offer thanks and praise."

In the *Birkat ha-mazon* praise is followed by thanksgiving, then supplication. Finally, a doxology is concluded by the community's "Amen." All these features are preserved in the eucharistic prayer. Since earliest times Christians have also included a greeting ("The Lord is here ...") and the invitation, "Lift up your hearts. **We lift them to the Lord.**" The Christian stress on thanksgiving rather than praise is reflected in the title "Eucharist" which is Greek for "thanksgiving."

The Last Supper narrative was inserted into the thanksgiving-supplication-doxology structure of the eucharistic prayer in two alternative positions. The church in the East placed it within the thanksgiving. In the West it was placed within the supplicatory material.

*The Book of Common Prayer* has an unusual, fragmented eucharistic prayer. Reception of communion comes in the middle of this eucharistic prayer (which later continues with "O Lord and heavenly Father,...."). It serves, nonetheless, as an example of the Western pattern, with the institution narrative coming within the supplicatory section, "Hear us, O merciful Father, ...."

All Anglican revisions in New Zealand since 1970, however, have followed the Eastern pattern of placing the institution narrative within the thanksgiving. This has not always been the case overseas.

As with the Collect, in this central prayer we are reminded that as Christ's body we pray through, with and in Christ, by the power of the Spirit to the Father. This trinitarian emphasis is also reflected in the structure of the Great Thanksgiving. Thanksgiving of the Father is followed by memorial of Christ and invocation of the Spirit.

In the Prayer Book there is an authorised framework for writing eucharistic prayers (pages 512-514). Although writing eucharistic prayers is not easy, this provision expects that the gifts for this may be quite widely present.

In the framework the introductory dialogue is fixed. As noted above, the words "Lift up your hearts ..." unite us with Christians over ten thousand Sundays, and many denominations. "Let us give thanks ..." goes back even further, to the Judaism of Jesus' time and earlier.

Thanksgiving for creation, revelation and salvation is required but the wording is free. The "Holy, Holy, Holy ..." (*Sanctus*) and "Blessed is he who comes ..." (*Benedictus qui venit*) may be incorporated. Many eucharistic prayers give extensive thanks for creation. This and God's action among the Hebrew people might precede the "Holy, Holy,....," with God's action in Christ following the "Blessed is he..."

The institution narrative is fixed. Care needs to be taken in placing a congregational acclamation directly after the Last Supper narrative. This can give the false impression that this narrative is the "moment" of consecration. In any case acclamations are better introduced by a characteristic cue line. For example,

"Gracious God, we now celebrate the memorial of our redemption.

From the gifts you have given us  
we offer you this bread and this cup,  
and proclaim the mystery of our faith,

**Christ has died,**

**Christ is risen,**

**Christ will come in glory."**

Another option is to have several congregational acclamations throughout the text or a simple one repeated at intervals.

The memorial of Christ and invocation of the Spirit again are fixed and may lead into intercession and prayer for the benefits of communion. A doxology (the wording of which is free) and an "Amen" ends the prayer.

A single eucharistic prayer can not say everything. Hence choices need to be made. In the West, rather than recite all the acts of God in one prayer, proper prefaces celebrated a particular aspect of God's action at a particular celebration.

Examples of Great Thanksgiving prayers written to conform to *A Form for Ordering the Eucharist* are to be found later in this book.

## **The Lord's Prayer**

The Lord's Prayer has had a very long association with this point of the service. For more than sixteen centuries it has been seen as the appropriate preparation for receiving the Sacrament. It was placed in its present position, after the Great Thanksgiving, by Gregory the Great (590-604), in a sense extending and concluding that prayer.

From the early church the "daily bread" was identified with the Eucharist, the "living bread" which is "food indeed" (John 6:51,55). We come seeking forgiveness and we forgive others as we receive the cup given for the forgiveness of sins. Through the Eucharist we are strengthened to hallow God's name in our daily lives, to work and to pray that God's kingdom may come, and to do God's will on earth as it is in heaven.

The presider can assume the *orans* position for the Lord's Prayer. As this posture is the common possession of all Christians and not reserved for the clergy, it is particularly appropriate for the whole assembly to join the presider in this posture for the recitation of the Lord's own prayer.

There are several good congregational settings to which the Lord's Prayer can be sung.

In introducing the Lord's Prayer, a theme or thread of the service can be picked up by the presider. For example in Advent: "Let us pray for the coming of the kingdom as Jesus taught us."

## *Some Questions*

*The third paragraph of this chapter says; "God consecrates in response to the whole Great Thanksgiving prayer ...And it is part of the art of presiding... which draws in the whole assembly and involves them in this sense that this prayer is being proclaimed on behalf of all. Education will affect this, as will the design of the liturgical space, and the robes worn." Having read this chapter it may be helpful to have some trusted people review what happens within this section of the Eucharist in your*

*setting, asking whether there are changes that might further enhance the sense of participation that is referred to here by the author.*