

A ritual for a Holy, Communal Meal at home in the season of COVID-19

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Version 1A

Notes on the service:

- This ritual is not meant to be done alone or apart from an actual meal. Jesus said “where two or three are gathered, I am with them.” Gather whomever is able to be at table to eat a meal together and make it a celebration.
- If you live alone (or even if you don’t) get someone on the phone, or even better on a video call Zoom or Facetime, so that you can eat together even if you can’t be in the same place.
- Sunday is an appropriate day to use this ritual, but you can use it for any meal on any day, as often as you like.
- Choose a person to lead the service: perhaps an elder, or a parent, or whomever carves the thanksgiving turkey. If you choose a child to lead, be sure that you have given them instructions and allowed them to practice ahead of time.
- Given the connection of this ritual to the sacrament of Holy Communion, bread and wine (or grape juice) are the most appropriate elements to use. However, you can substitute based on what you have access to or what you are able to eat and drink.
- The wine/juice can be kept in a bottle or pitcher and poured during the ritual, or individual cups pre-poured for each participant.
- The first few times you do this, you may want to read aloud the entire introduction. But as you continue to engage the practice, you may find it repetitive. Perhaps you would want to substitute a scripture reading, devotion, song, story or something else—or to right skip to the “Order for Blessing” as a table grace.

Introduction

Read this or another introduction aloud to those gathered at table before the meal begins

L: Like Jesus’ first disciples after his death and resurrection, we find ourselves in a time when gathering together publically or in large groups isn’t safe. Confined to our homes, we gather at our own tables with only our closest family members—or we find ourselves eating our meals alone. We long to reconnect, to celebrate, to eat and drink with one another, to simply be together face-to-face. We miss the experience of being present—in the flesh—with our friends and family. We miss coming together for worship and service and being gathered as we are accustomed to at Christ’s table with the bread and wine of Holy Communion. And yet, for now,

we just simply can't be together in that way. But Jesus commanded us to eat and drink and remember him, and so we are gathered here and now to do just that.

At the heart of the sacrament of Holy Communion is the retelling of the story of Jesus' last supper, a difficult night when Jesus gathered with his friends for the last time—at least for the last time in the way they were used to. They gathered, as they always did, around a table for a meal and Jesus gave them a new practice: a way to experience his presence with them—really present with them—that would carry them through the hard times they were in, and continue to draw them together week after week, year after year, generation after generation. The early Christians followed this meal-time practice, and for at least 200 years the celebration of Holy Communion took place at the dinner table where Jesus' disciples gathered again and again to do as Jesus commanded: to eat and drink with one another, and to remember that he is with us always. At some point, we separated the ritual act of Holy Communion from the communal meal—but it has never lost its deep connection to Jesus call to eat meals together and remember that whenever two or three are gathered, that Christ is with us.

When we gather the church-community in our church buildings, we engage in Holy Communion, not just as spectators to a long-ago tale, but as participants in a living story that we continue to live into day after day. We proclaim that Christ is really present, in, with, and under ordinary things—bread, wine, water, human relationships. And we proclaim that God's love, forgiveness, and presence are “for us” as a community together and also that these promises are “for you”—for each and every one of us. And when we share in the meal together, we are reminded that we, the Church, “become the Body of Christ” and are sent out to embody God's love everywhere we go.

But the bread and wine of Holy Communion are not the only place we believe God to be present—in fact, just the opposite. We remind each other again and again of Christ's promise to be present in bread and wine when we gather for Communion so that we can remember to recognize that Christ is actually present all around us: in our families, in our struggles and our joys, in our neighborhoods, in the face of the poor, in all of God's creation. God again and again breathes life into ordinary things and ordinary people, filling everything (including us) with the Holy Spirit, and bringing us through the shadow of death into the light of new life.

Order of Blessing

This is led at table at the beginning of a meal with at least two people present

L: We gather, as we are baptized, in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

The leader and participants may make the sign of the cross.

L: Even though we can't gather for Holy Communion in the way we are used to, we can continue to do as Jesus commanded—to proclaim the Good News, remember Jesus, share bread and wine, eat and drink, and encounter the presence of the living God together as we come together in this Holy, Communal Meal.

L: Whenever they were scared or struggling, Jesus again and again said to his disciples: "Peace be with you!" And so, as we gather, let us put aside our fears and divisions, and be reconciled to one another and to God. The Peace of the Lord be with you always!

C: And also with you.

The community shares signs of peace with one another, and may extend the peace to others not present through electronic communications.

L: Let us remember those who are unable to be at this table today, and name out loud those we wish were with us now:

After the names are spoken, the leader prays:

L: God, we give thanks for those gathered here, and for those who cannot be with us. May we all be held together in your loving embrace until we can once again gather together at your table.

C: Amen.

A hymn or table grace may be sung and/or this or another scripture read:

Jesus said: "I am the bread of life; whoever comes to me shall not hunger, and whoever believes in me shall never thirst." John 6:35

L: When our congregation last gathered together in person for the celebration of Holy Communion, Pastor _____ proclaimed to us again the story of God's mighty acts and of the love shown us in the death and resurrection of our Lord Jesus Christ. With thanksgiving, we remembered that, "in the night in which he was betrayed, Jesus took bread, and gave thanks; broke it, and gave it to his disciples, saying: 'Take and eat; this is my body, given for you. Do this for the remembrance of me.' Again, after supper, he took the cup, gave thanks, and gave it for all to drink, saying: 'This cup is the new covenant in my blood, shed for you and for all people for the forgiveness of sin. Do this for the remembrance of me.'" Together we ate bread and drank wine, the body and blood of Christ, and we were refreshed through the healing power of this gift of life. We were renewed and re-formed as the Body of Christ, and sent for the sake of the world to love and serve the Lord.

L: Let us pray as Jesus taught us:

**C: Our Father in heaven,
hallowed be your name,
your kingdom come,
your will be done, on earth as in heaven.
Give us today our daily bread.
Forgive us our sins
as we forgive those who sin against us.
Save us from the time of trial and deliver us
from evil. For the kingdom, the power, and
the glory are yours, now and forever. Amen.**

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

The leader takes the bread and prays:

L: Blessed are you, Lord our God, ruler of the universe, you who have brought forth bread from the earth.

The bread is passed to all at the table and all eat. The bread can continue to be eaten throughout the meal.

The leader pours a cup of wine/juice and prays:

L: Blessed are you, Lord our God, ruler of the universe, you who created the fruit of the vine.

The wine/juice is passed to all at the table and all drink. The wine/juice can continue to be drunk throughout the meal.

The meal is eaten

As the meal is ending, the leader prays:

L: God of abundance, you have revealed yourself to us in the breaking of the bread. With this bread of life and this cup of salvation you have united us with Christ, making us one with all your people. Now send us forth in the power of your Spirit, that we may proclaim your redeeming love to the world and continue forever in the risen life of Jesus Christ, our Lord.

C: Amen

The leader remains sitting and leads the benediction:

L: The Lord bless us and keep us, the Lord make his face shine upon us and be gracious to us, the Lord look upon us with favor, and give us peace.

C: Amen

The leader and participants may make the sign of the cross.

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