

Snapshots of the Supper

“In every place and at every time offer me a pure sacrifice; for I am a great King, says the Lord, and my Name is wonderful among the nations” (Didache 14, quoting Malachi 1:11).

The Sequence of My Childhood

- Servers would walk down a center aisle
- Perhaps there would be a word or two of explanation
- Prayer for the bread
- Distribution
- Prayer for the wine
- Distribution
- End of the Supper
- Prayer for Offering

The question that we can ask is how did we get this sequence? Some would say that we got this sequence from the Bible and that all true Christians would receive the Supper in this manner. As a Scripture, they would turn to 1 Corinthians 11:23-25. Here Paul summarizes that Jesus took bread and blessed it; then he took the cup and blessed it. That was his sequence and should be ours.

What I want to do today is to look at snapshots of the Supper to show the sequence and practice over time.

The Early Church: Evidence from the Church Fathers

1. Didache

One of the earliest Christian documents is the Didache. In chapter 9, we can see their 2nd Century Christian practice:

“First, as regards the cup:
We give Thee thanks, O our Father,
for the holy vine of Thy son David,
which Thou made known unto us
through Thy Son Jesus;
Thine is the glory forever and ever.

Then as regarding the broken bread:
We give Thee thanks, O our Father,
for the life and knowledge
which Thou didst make known unto us
through Thy Son Jesus;
Thine is the glory forever and ever.

We can see that Didache retains a similar order found in Luke 22 of cup and then bread—which is closer to the original Jewish cultural context.

Didache 10 has a prayer of thankfulness after the Supper

And after ye are satisfied thus give ye thanks:

We give Thee thanks, Holy Father,
 for Thy holy name,
 which Thou hast made to tabernacle in
 our hearts, and for the knowledge and
 faith and immortality,
 which Thou hast made known unto us
 through Thy Son Jesus;
 Thine is the glory for ever and ever.

Thou, Almighty Master,
 didst create all things for Thy name's
 sake,
 and didst give food and drink unto men
 for enjoyment, that they might render
 thanks to Thee;
 but didst bestow upon us spiritual food
 and drink and eternal life through Thy
 Son.

Before all things we give Thee thanks

that Thou art powerful;
 Thine is the glory for ever and ever.

Remember, Lord, Thy Church
 to deliver it from all evil
 and to perfect it in Thy love;
 and gather it together from the four
 winds- even the Church which has been
 sanctified-
 into Thy kingdom which Thou hast
 prepared for it; for Thine is the power
 and the glory for ever and ever.

May grace come and may this world
 pass away.
 Hosanna to the God of David.
 If any man is holy, let him come;
 if any man is not, let him repent.
 Maranatha. Amen

2. Comments on the Sequence in Didache

The first context for the Lord's Supper seems to have been the Passover. In Luke 22:14-20, we have the clearest window into the extended Jewish practice of Passover:

The Jewish Model	The Lukan Evidence (Luke 22:14-20)
Cup [<i>berakah</i>] Bread [<i>berakah</i>] Meal Cup [<i>birkat ha-mazon</i>]	The cup & prayer of blessing The bread & prayer of blessing The Meal The cup after supper with thanksgiving

Please Note:

1. Wine is not prescribed in the Old Testament.
2. The general themes of the two times of prayer – Before the meal and after

[*berakah*] – words of praise to God. Blessed are you God . . .
 [*birkat ha-mazon*] – words of thankfulness for nourishment

3. Justin Martyr's Report

He lived between 100-165 AD.

Bread and a cup containing wine mixed with water are brought forward to the one presiding over the brethren.

He takes them and offers praise and glory to the Father of all, through the name of the Son and the Holy Spirit, and he says lengthy prayers of thanksgiving (*eucharistia*) to God in the name of those to whom He granted these favors. At the end of these prayers and thanksgiving, all those present approve by saying, "Amen."

When he who presides has said the *eucharistia* and all the people have responded, they who are called deacons permit each one present to partake of the bread that has been blessed and the wine and the water, and they also carry them to those not present.

We call this food *eucharistia*. We partake of it not as ordinary bread nor ordinary drink,

but just as through the Word of God, our Savior Jesus Christ became incarnate and took upon himself flesh and blood for our salvation, so we have been taught,

the food which has been blessed by the prayer according to his word, and which nourishes our flesh and blood by assimilation, is the flesh and blood of that same Jesus who was made flesh.

The Apostles in their memoirs, which are called Gospels, have handed down what Jesus ordered them to do:

he took bread, gave thanks, and said: "Do this in remembrance of me; this is my body." In the same way, he also took the cup, gave thanks, and said: "This is my blood," and he gave it to them.

[Though we did not discuss this in class]

3. The Apostolic Tradition of Hippolytus (170-236 AD)

Another excellent source of early Christian practice is Hippolytus, who wrote an early church manual. It gives one of the earliest and most complete pictures of liturgy that surrounded the practice of the Lord's Supper. See Oskar Skarsaune's *In the Shadow of the Temple*, pg. 414.

* The most distinctive features of this liturgy are 1) the dialogue between the Leader and the People and 2) the elaborate prayers.

The Lord' Supper in the 4th Century- 7th Centuries

- The Use of the Basilica
- The Clothes & Procession
- The use of Lights & Incense
- The standarization of liturgy (shaped deeply by Apostolic Tradition)
- The importance of the prayers of consecration
- The presentation of the bread to each worthy communicant

“From the end of the fourth century [frequent communion] declined rapidly in both East and West, except in conservative churches like Rome. The stress on the holy and terrifying character of the consecrated elements, which first appears in Cyril of Jerusalem, with the consequent insistence that only those suitably prepared should approach them, discouraged most communicants”

Hugh Wybrew, “The Byzantine Liturgy,” In *The Study of Liturgy*, p. 213

American Puritan Practice

The Early English Christians in America in the 17th-18th century who fled from religious persecution to be a city set on a hill. They were largely frustrated by the half-way reforms that surrounded the Anglican church.

- Notice of the Supper is given one month in advance
- The Supper is served at the conclusion of the regular service
- Only members in full standing with the church stay to participate
- The presiding minister leaves the raised pulpit
- He joins the ruling elders at a Head Table
- The members sit in seats
- The Bread and Wine are consecrated together
- A Prayer is said before the bread (by a Teaching Elder or the Minister)
- The Bread is put into a plate and passed around the head table
- The Bread is passed around to members who are sitting
- The Cup is blessed and distributed in the same manner

“All of them in such a way as sets forth the Elements, not blessed together, but either of them apart; the bread by itself, and afterwards the wine by itself; for what reason the Lord himself knows, and we cannot be ignorant” John Cotton, *The Way of the Churches of Christ in New England* (1645).

Note: One of the major differences in addition to the 2 prayers was that participants sat (as opposed to the kneeling which was par of the Anglican tradition).