

The Eucharist Culture

Picturing Communion with the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit

The Christian journey begins with the *calling* of God (John 6:44; Eph. 4:1). God initiates, He calls us to Himself; we're forever responding in trust (faith) and obedience. Jesus invites us to follow Him via a distinctive form of life called discipleship (Matt. 16:24-26). Discipleship is dynamic and communal; it's a pilgrimage in which we grow in love for God and humankind (Matthew 22:37-40) as we follow Jesus via the way of the cross and resurrection in the power of the Spirit. God's vision is the reconciliation of all things—creation reunited in an eternal Communion of love (Col. 1:15-23). We experience a foretaste of this Communion in the present, tangibly, in the life of our local congregation that exist as a sign, symbol, and instrument of the new creation begun already in Christ (II Cor. 5:11-21). We await the full consummation of God's Kingdom at the appearing of Jesus and the final judgment (Titus 2:11-14).

Every aspect of Christian discipleship involves the Holy Spirit (I Cor. 12:3). The Spirit is our companion sent to us by Jesus so that we would never be left alone (John 14:15-27). As the Spirit hovered over the murky waters in the first creation (Gen. 1), He now hovers over us, bringing about new life (Acts 2). The sign of the Spirit's presence is a lifestyle and character that resembles that of Jesus (Gal. 5:16-25) and a heart that instinctively cries out to God through Christ as our Abba Father (Romans 8:14-17). The result of the Spirit's work is nothing short of new creation. As we increasingly orient all of life around Christ (Col. 3:17), we are made fully alive, fully ourselves in Communion with the Trinity through Christ's Body, the Church (John 15; Ephesians 2). This new creation community is a place of vibrant joy and creativity where all of life is put in service of the glory of God.

Throughout our journey of discipleship, the life of the Trinity is made available to us through the Holy Spirit by means of the Word of God (John 1:1-18; Hebrews 1:1-3; 4:12-13) and the Sacraments (Matt. 26:26-29; 28:18-20), which are mysteries, means of grace. We are adopted into God's household and initiated into the new creation, the Body of Christ, through the cleansing waters of Baptism (Acts 2:37-47; John 3:1-16). The ongoing, beating heart of this new life is communion with God, which we tangibly renew each week in receiving the Eucharist (I Cor. 11:23-26). At the Communion table we re-enact the gospel of Jesus' death and resurrection on our behalf and are remembered into His body as we renew our identity in Christ in order to be sent out to be His hands, feet, arms and mouthpiece to the world. But all of this isn't complete until we are gathered together in order to be renewed again in Communion, this time with others with us. Everything in the Christian journey comes back to Communion, as this is the very life of the Trinity (II Pet. 1:3-4). It is our vision, our means, our end, our hope, and our greatest joy. It is the source and summit of life (John 6:35-58; John 17).

This is life as God intended it: the good life.

What follows is an outline of this life and its distinctive marks framed around three categories: Responding to God, Christian Virtues and Daily Life. Taken together, this is what we refer to as our Eucharist Culture.

Responding to God

Grace: The Christian life is a response to God's generosity. Life, to begin with, is a gift. But as Christians we have been offered life from above (John 3:3-8), a place in God's very own household, as a gratuitous gift. Grace begins in Christ calling us, "come follow me." It continues as He gives us His Spirit to enable us to follow Him. His grace is evident in His mercy and forgiveness (I John 1:8-9). From beginning to end, Christian life is immersed in grace.

Faith | Obedience: To be a disciple of Jesus is to entrust every aspect of life to God through Christ. Faith is the proper response to God's loving faithfulness; it's our means of being united to Christ. We are saved by grace *through faith* (Eph. 2:1-10). We open our hands to God in a posture of trust (Matt. 6:25-34). Trust, in concrete terms, means obedience (faithfulness), which emerges from a humble conviction that God knows best how I should live my life. This is what a Christian states in his/her baptismal vow: "Jesus is Lord."

Worship | Humility: It is from the posture of worship that we see life rightly, with God at the center of it all (Matt. 6:33). We become keenly aware of God's all encompassing love, His holiness, His justice, and His transcendent mystery, which cannot but inspire humility. To worship is to know and love God with all one's heart, soul, mind and strength (Mark 12:28-31).

Communion | Repentance: Union with God is our deepest desire and most precious treasure. Sadly, we easily wander from God. Christian life is a constant return to God. Apart from the mercy of God this would be impossible (Rom. 2:4). With the Spirit's help we open our heart in humility toward God and others. We are quick to admit wrongdoing and make restitution (whenever possible) (Luke 19:1-10). As we encounter God we see the depth of our sinfulness; we discover our selfishness and weakness in sharp contrast to God's holiness, power, grace and forgiveness (Is. 6:1-8). We never forget that we are sinners saved by grace (Eph. 2:1-10).

Christian Virtues

The following are communal and personal habits of character (virtues) to be exercised under the reign of Christ.

Love: Love of God and love of neighbor is the whole of Christian life (Matt. 22:37-40). We define love by Jesus - his life, death, and resurrection (John 15:13; I John 4:7-21). Following Jesus' teachings and example, we demonstrate our love with concrete action, not just words (I John 3:11-17; James 2:14-26). We actively seek restitution for victims in cases of injustice and work to prevent future injustice. We forgive and seek the good of our enemies (Matt. 5:38-48) - choosing to suffer injustice ourselves rather than perpetuate evil. We work to relieve suffering of all kinds in our city and around the world. Above all, we reveal the character of God to the on-looking world by our unified love for each other as we serve and offer care to one another as brothers and sisters in Christ (John 13:35).

Joy: A life of discipleship is a life animated by joy (“enter into the joy of your master” Matt. 25:21,23). Joy is the overflow of a life lived in harmony with God’s intentions (obedience) (John 15:9-11; 17:13). Practically speaking, we are *seriously* committed to being able to laugh at ourselves, have fun, and fully appreciate life together in a rich community of life-giving relationships. We seek every opportunity possible to celebrate the good gifts of God in each other’s lives.

Peacemaking (Shalom) | Reconciliation: To follow Jesus is to be reconciled with God and to work for the reconciliation of broken relationships wherever we find them. We are committed to forgiving others in the same manner God forgives us. In light of the cross, Jesus-followers do not seek revenge but entrust God with final justice (Rom. 12:14-21), while actively seeking non-violent means of conflict resolution. We are devoted to solving conflicts between believers within the Christian community rather than in public court (I Cor. 6:1-8). Overall we live in anticipation of the final reconciliation of all things and work passionately toward that shalom within our present context (Rev. 21-22).

Patience: To follow Jesus is to learn to wait (Ps. 27:14), to persevere (Rom. 5:3-5). In an instant-results world this can be excruciatingly difficult. But we are a community that seeks God’s timing and God’s way rather than our own. Thus, we follow the example of Jesus who “endured suffering for the sake of the joy set before Him” (Hebrews 12:1-2). In our waiting and suffering, we have the opportunity to learn how to treat others with grace and sensitivity and experience a transformation of our own character.

Kindness | Hospitality: In a world of loneliness, insecurity, and social pretentiousness we seek to build relational bridges to people around us (especially those who are different from us) through listening, laughter, engaging conversation, and serving. Following Jesus’ example and teaching, we approach the world from a posture of hospitality. Hospitality involves being fully present to the needs (physical, emotional, or spiritual) of another person and listening well with Christ-like empathy. We grieve with those suffering and celebrate with those celebrating. We seek to genuinely know people and strive to help them feel valued in our presence. We do all of this while discerning healthy limits and God-given boundaries. We are careful not to assume the role of Messiah. Rather, we point people to the true Messiah. This is the difference between being an icon versus being an idol (you see through an icon; an idol is an end in itself).

Generosity: God is the ultimate giver. We gratefully celebrate the countless, extraordinary gifts of God with an attitude of abundance. As stewards of these gifts, we have an opportunity to seek the well-being of others and the advancement of God’s Kingdom. Gratitude compels us to share our resources: time, money, possessions, energy, and creativity. Greed and selfish individualism are particularly potent threats to the mission of God and the health of the church and must be resisted at all costs. The call of God to care for the poor and provide for the ministry of the church, although commanded by the Scriptures, is seen as a privilege and honor – a participation in the mission of God.

Gentleness: In Jesus we meet the gentle and humble savior who, as the “suffering servant” (Isaiah 53), embraced weakness over power. Jesus demonstrates that true strength is found in weakness. It is the meek who will inherit the earth (Matt. 5:5), not the ambitious. Christian faith invites us to risk vulnerability and to be wounded healers. Our community is to be a center of mercy and compassion. In relationship to our calling to disciple non-believers, gentleness means we refuse to use any form of manipulation. We

respect those we live with who choose not to believe, offering them dignity as people made in the image of God. We seek to treat others as we would like to be treated (Matt. 7:12).

Self-Control | Faithfulness: To be a disciple of Jesus is to actively bring one's entire life under the Lordship of Jesus in the power of the Spirit: bodily life, thoughts, emotions, relationships and every other aspect of life (Rom. 12:1-2). Followers of Jesus refrain from all patterns of addiction and act with moderation and self-restraint toward any practice, behavior, or substance that could potentially enslave (Gal. 5:1), cause others to stumble (I Cor. 8,10), or draw them from the way of Jesus (18:6-9).

Two items invite special comment under this section due to our present cultural context and the amount of attention these topics receive in scripture: Marriage & Sexuality and Creation Care.

Marriage & Sexuality: In Christian baptism we proclaim that our bodies, including our sexuality, belong to God. He has purchased them through the cross (I Cor. 6:19-20). Thus, we seek to honor God with our sexuality. The revealed will of God in the Scriptures and echoed throughout the consensual, historical tradition of Christian teaching holds that all sexual activity belongs only within a lifelong, publicly covenanted, monogamous relationship between a man and a woman (marriage) (Matt. 5:27-33; Matt. 19:1-12).

Marriage is referred to by St. Paul in Ephesians 5 as a mystery (sacrament), illuminating the gospel and operating as an icon of the Trinity. For those who are called to marry, marriage operates as a school of character in which one learns to love unselfishly and submit to their spouse out of reverence for Christ (Eph. 5:21). If the tragedy of divorce should occur, the possibility of remarriage to a new spouse must be discerned only with great caution and humility, and only in cases in accordance with sound Christian teaching. Anglican teaching requires the permission of the bishop.

In light of the example and teaching of Jesus, we believe a person can indeed be healthy and whole (truly human) in a state of singleness. Thus, regardless of whether we find ourselves married, dating, or single we seek to remain chaste in mind and body. While recognizing that certain aspects of our sexuality may or may not be malleable, humanly speaking, we commit ourselves to faithfulness to the will of God in whatever state (singleness/marriage) we find ourselves (I Cor. 7). Following Jesus means resisting lust and learning to control our sexual desires under the leadership of the Holy Spirit (Gal. 5:16-23).

Singleness and marriage are equally faithful ways of honoring God (Matt. 19:1-12). Singleness anticipates the life of the Kingdom to come, while marriage acts as a sign pointing the way to the same Kingdom.

Creation Care: God has uniquely given humans a role in the oversight and care of creation (Gen. 1-2). Its flourishing depends on a co-creative partnership between God and us. Insofar as we have abdicated this responsibility, creation not only fails to realize its potential, but also suffers (Rom. 8:18-25). In the new creation God will re-entrust stewardship of the earth to those who have proved faithful to Him (Matt. 25:14-30). In Revelation 11:18 God warns that those who destroy the earth will

themselves be destroyed. Therefore, we do everything within our power to protect and cultivate the marvelous gift of God's creation.

Gratitude: Thanksgiving (*Eucharistia* in Greek) is one of the most important practices for the Christian. It is perhaps the most practical way to re-orient all of life in reference to God. It reminds us that every good and perfect gift comes from the Father above (James 1:17). We offer gratitude at all times, even in the midst of suffering, because of Christ (Romans 5:3-5; Phil. 4:4-7; 12-13; I Thes. 5:16-18)

Truth-Telling: Living with integrity and speaking truthfully are fundamental to Christian faith and practice (Eph. 4:25). Truth is never the enemy of Christian faith because Jesus is Truth incarnate (John 14:6). Healthy community is built on trust; truth-telling and transparency are foundational to trust. When trust is damaged or relationships are strained, we follow the teaching of the New Testament as we intentionally seek a healthy process of conflict resolution (Matt. 5:21-26; 18:15-20). We avoid passive and/or passive-aggressive patterns of behavior and communication. This means we must courageously move toward loving confrontation and direct communication (Gal. 1-2; Acts 15), trusting that forgiveness and reconciliation are possible because of the gospel (Matt. 18:21-35). In all that we do, we seek to build up the church as a trusting and loving communion while we honor appropriate confidentiality and avoid gossip.

Hope | Boldness: Hope is the backbone of the Christian life. We ground all of our hope in the God of the resurrection (I Cor. 15). This hope gives us freedom to endure suffering and injustice for God's sake in the confidence that God will make all things new (Rom. 5:3-5). We trust that God will do for us what was done for Jesus, who after obediently suffering and experiencing death was raised as the first fruits from the dead in a bodily resurrection (Rom. 6:1-11). We live in anticipation of the final resurrection, where God will wipe every tear from our eyes and sin will be no more (Rev. 21-22). This hope fuels us with perseverance, confidence and boldness as we partner with God in extending the movement of Jesus in San Francisco and beyond.

Daily Life

Loving God and my neighbor in the midst of daily life.

Work: Much of our waking life is spent working (Ex. 20:9). This is not incidental to God's plan for our discipleship. We view our work in the context of God's redemptive work in and through Christ and His Body (the Church). The scriptures teach that the telos (end) of God's whole creation project is, mysteriously, the emergence of the Church as a distinctive people for Himself who will co-reign with Christ over the New Creation (Eph. 1:15-23; 3:1-13). Thus, the Church can never be secondary to our vision of God's work in the world, nor our own work.

However, this does not mean that only our service (paid or volunteer) directly to the Church is meaningful. In fact, the Church can only operate as God intended if it expresses a pattern of gathering and scattering. At the end of worship we are intentionally *sent* into the world to be salt and light (Matt. 5:13-16) and to bear Christ's name. A primary form that this sent-ness (scattering / dispersion) takes is in being sent to our various places of work. God sends faithful people to every corner of society and to every type of socially beneficial / ethical work to be a light shining in the darkness. In our

work, we seek the common good of our neighbors, including creation itself. We do this while working from a vision of the world in terms of judgment, the second coming, and the culmination of all things in Christ.

Our work is not meaningless; nor is it necessarily merely instrumental, though work in and of itself is a good and important means of building character, providing for daily needs, and gathering wealth in order to share with those in need (Eph. 4:28). In the end (at the judgment) we're told that God will bring into His kingdom the "glory and honor of the nations" (Rev. 21:25-27). This means that the *good* created in our world (art, culture, music, etc.) may, in fact, find itself drawn up into eternity. Whether our work is menial, mundane, and hidden, or creative, inspiring, and public, we work with integrity, excellence, and humility *as unto the Lord* (Col. 3:23).

Witness: We are witnesses of the resurrected Jesus. He is master over all things. We are called to faithfully, humbly, intelligently, and lovingly proclaim the message that "Jesus is Lord" in word and deed to the world around us: in the public square, in our workplace, in our neighborhood, in our families and to each other (1 Pet. 3:15-16). In the same way that Jesus passionately invested Himself in the people around Him, we pour ourselves into the faith journey of those around us. We act with courage and faith while listening for the prompting of the Spirit.

Prayer | Worship: To be a disciple of Jesus is to be in personal relationship with the Trinitarian God (John 17:3). In the experience of prayer we both speak to God and listen for His voice. But prayer is not just a transfer of information. It is about communion and intimacy, about being together. As followers of Jesus, we anchor our lives from the silence and solitude necessary to nurture a vibrant life of prayer. We pray in rhythms of faithfulness, daily inviting God to bring our hearts in line with our lips.

Rest | Recreation: Long before we contribute anything to the world, we are considered treasured by God as beings made in His image. This security of identity allows a follower of Jesus to enter God's rest (Heb. 4) - dependent on God's declaration of our value and God's work. We resist our world's addiction to esteeming people based on what they produce. On a practical level, our lives are punctuated by life-giving recreation and meaningful rest as a testimony to our faith in God's sovereignty and faithfulness. A powerful and important practice for Christians is the practice of Sabbath. We carve out time for rest on a daily as well as weekly basis as an act of faith in order to nurture our relationship with God and others.