

Christ" (5:19-20) and to the Philippians (4:4) "Rejoice in the Lord always and again I say, Rejoice."

4. The offering. This consisted of the purely voluntary contributions of the congregation. It was so from the beginning; even in that wonderful outburst of religious enthusiasm when all the property was given up by certain converts there was no requirement to do so. Every person was to give according to his ability and the offering was taken up on the first day of the week. If a man chose to give all he had or a certain proportion, that was a matter settled between him and God, but all were urged to contribute to the full extent of their ability. The money was used for the poor of the church, for missionary purposes, the support of the ministry, the other expenses of maintaining the church organization and gifts for special purposes.

Baptism was the rite by which the convert was formally admitted to the Church (Ac 2: 41). Baptism was by the command of Christ (Mt 28: 19); it was and is the outward sign of the inward cleansing and is to be administered to all Christians.

From the earliest days of the Church until Vatican II, the Mass was described as having two parts - the "Mass of the Catechumens" and the "Secret": Today's Mass is divided into the Liturgy of the Word and the Liturgy of the Eucharist. The Mass of the catechumens was open to the public, but the "Secret" (Liturgy of the Eucharist) was restricted to those who had committed their lives to Christ and had been baptized.

The Eucharistic celebration was not only a part of the secret, but the central point in it. The observance of this feast was also by the command of Christ, Who said, "This do in remembrance of Me". The expression of the "breaking of bread" in Acts 2:42 has reference to a religious act, a sacrament (1 Co 10:16).

There seems to have been at first a daily Eucharistic celebration (Ac 2:46), but later it seems to have been observed on the first day of the week (Ac 20:7). At first it was held in the evening at the close of a meal eaten in common, following the example of Christ and His disciples. The meal was called the Agape—or love feast—and was afterwards separated from the Eucharist. In Paul's advice to the Corinthian Christians when he saw the abuse, which grew out of the meal eaten in common. The significance of this sacrament was then deepened and intensified in the minds and hearts of the Christians, as its great spiritual meaning was more and more clearly understood. This was, as it still is today, the central point of worship in the apostolic age.

If we look in the New Testament and also that of the early Christian writers, we find that God, the Father, was exalted and worshipped and Jesus Christ, His Son, and the Holy Spirit. The baptismal formulas were in the names of the three in one. Christ was the Lord and Savior Who had come from the Father, Who had appeared on earth in bodily form and was, after His ascension, still with the disciples comforting, leading and blessing not only them but all who had faith in Him and called upon His name.

The centrality of the worship in Christ is very plainly stated by Paul, "That every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of the Father" (Phil 2:11; 5-11; Col 1:13-21).

The exaltation of Christ exalted the lives of the worshippers; they died to the old lives of sin and strove to be renewed in the purity and holiness of the life of the Master whom they served and revered.

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<https://www.pjpiisoe.com> Pamphlet 169



Early Christian Worship

Early Christian membership and participation in worship was characterized by three essential requirements:

- 1. Repentance of sin;**
- 2. Faith in Christ; and**
- 3. Baptism**

With membership came certain privileges:

- 1.** The Christian became reconciled to God. His past life of sin no longer stood against him. He was justified; made right, in God's eyes.
- 2.** He was sanctified; made holy, because he belonged to God through baptism.
- 3.** He received the gift of the Holy Spirit as a supernatural power within him.
- 4.** He was admitted to the common life and the sacraments of Christian brotherhood. On his part, in turn, he was bound, so far as he could, to live up to the high standards of that life; to be a new creature in Christ.

One of the great responsibilities of the Church is to teach us how to worship God. Jesus said, "God is spirit, and those who worship Him must worship in spirit and truth" (Jn 4:24). Men must be led in their worship by a proper explanation of the Scriptures, by prayer and praise. We, as Christians, need to be properly formed in accordance with the teachings of Christ. The Church's mission is to reconcile mankind to God by preaching the "Good News". Christianity is not a secret cult. Its principles and doctrines were promulgated not for a chosen few, but for all men and for all ages. Jesus' parting instructions to His disciples were, "Go

into all the world and preach the gospel to the whole creation" (Mk 16:15; Mt 28:19-20; Ac 1:8).

From the first Pentecost, the Disciples of Christ have endeavored to obey the Master's command. The Catholic Church, which began as insignificantly as a mustard seed, grew to a worldwide religion, which shelters all races and peoples of the world. In this universal character it differed from all other religions. The idea of an act of religious worship as something apart from the state was unheard of to the pagan mind.

The first meeting place for worship, after the ascension of Christ, was in an upper room in Jerusalem where prayer and supplication were made by the disciples. The second place was the Temple where Peter preached his sermon and thousands of people were converted. The third place was the "house church". When Peter was liberated from prison he came to the house of Mary, "where many were gathered together and were praying" (Ac 12: 12). The fourth place was the Jewish synagogue. There are many instances of Jesus preaching in synagogues. "And He went about all Galilee, teaching in their synagogues and preaching the gospel of the kingdom and healing every disease and every infirmity among the people" (Mt 4:23). Paul's custom was, in his missionary travels, to first seek the Jewish synagogue and to proclaim that the Messiah and Savior had come in the person of Jesus Christ. In case the message was heeded, the worshippers would soon turn the place, practically into a Christian meeting place; in case it was not heeded, the Christians would split off from the Jewish congregation and seek houses or other places in which to meet. The Jewish synagogues played a great part in helping to spread Christianity. They were very numerous throughout the Roman Empire. The fifth place was the distinctively Christian church. At what specific time the Christians began to erect buildings for the purpose of holding services of worship in them is not known, but as they were

accustomed to hold frequent assemblies and the congregations rapidly increased, private houses would soon cease to accommodate them. In 1 Cor. 11: 20-22, Paul implies that the Corinthian church was meeting in some place other than a house. They did erect buildings, or rent them, and some of good size is apparent in spite of the numerous persecutions to which they were subjected. Later on, the churches grew to be large, numerous, and had lands attached to them is shown by the decree of the Emperor Diocletian in 302 A. D., ordering their destruction and the confiscation of their lands.

However, Christianity was a religion of the spirit and it was preached anywhere and everywhere, in the market place, by the roadside, by the river's edge, by the seashore and in the house, it did not depend upon a certain place or a ritual, but men in every place could worship God "in spirit and in truth" (Jn 4: 21-24).

The publicity or secrecy with which the meetings were held varied. In times of persecution the Christians were often compelled to abandon public services. Then there would be periods in which they met together in the most open way and publicly invited unbelievers.

Public Worship was characterized by:

- 1. Orderliness.** Paul exhorted the Corinthian church, "Let all things be done for edification" (1 Co 14:26-33). The effort was made in all the churches to carry out this injunction.
- 2. Openness.** The public services, which all Christians were expected to attend, were also open to non-Christians as well; in this respect they had a missionary aspect and were of great usefulness in extending knowledge of the Catholic religion.
- 3. Simplicity.** The church was, in certain respects, an outgrowth of the Jewish synagogue and it followed its simplicity. The descriptions of the simple life of the early

churches are drawn for us in the Acts and Epistles. In 1 Corinthians we find that Paul presents to us two kinds of Christian worship. Chapter 14 describes a meeting whose chief aim is mutual edification; in Chapter 11:17-34 one is for the purpose to partake of the Eucharist. It is for a meeting of the first kind that there was a public order of service; the second was of a private character and limited to baptized Christians.

There were four prominent and essential elements in the public service of worship.

1. Teaching. Under this would be included the reading of the Scriptures. Followed from the custom of the Jewish synagogue with the presentation of a sermon after the reading of the Scriptures.

There was also a large work done in the instruction of new converts in the facts of the Old Testament, the facts about Christ, His life on earth, His death and resurrection, and the Catholic doctrines. There was a "gift of teaching" and a class of men like Aquila and Apollo, who gave themselves to this needed work, and who were called teachers.

2. Prayer. Prayer was made standing or kneeling. The prayer of one person was often accepted as the prayer of all. There were special prayers for the advancement of the Gospel, for the civil rulers, for erring members, and for the needs of the community. There were very few formulated prayers with the exception of the Lord's Prayer and certain benedictions.

3. Praise. The hymns and ascriptions of praise are very frequently found in the New Testament and the early Christian writers. They express great religious emotion and thankfulness and outbursts of spoken praise of the goodness of God and for salvation through Jesus Christ. Paul's writing to the Ephesians says, "addressing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody in your heart to God. Giving thanks in all things always unto God and the Father in the name of our Lord Jesus