

This morning, in commemoration of the 549<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Book of Common Prayer, we are using the Communion Rite from the First Prayer Book of 1549.

Prior to the English Reformation, the forms of parish worship in the late medieval church in England varied according to local practice. By far the most common form in England was the Sarum or Salisbury Rite, whose language was Latin. The rite was not consolidated into a single book. Instead, the forms of service were drawn from the Missal (for the Mass), Breviary for the daily office, the Manual (for the occasional services of Baptism, Marriage, Burial etc), and the Pontifical (for the services appropriate to a Bishop—Confirmation, Ordination). The Preface to the 1549 book charged that “many times there was more business to find out what should be read, than to read it when it was found out.”

The work of producing one single English-language book for use throughout the whole of England was largely that of Thomas Cranmer,

Archbishop of Canterbury at first under the reign of Henry VIII, and later under his son Edward VI.

As you know from Confirmation Class, the English Reformation was largely a reform of Church government, and not a change of theology as in the Lutheran and Reformed churches on the Continent. It was never the intention of the English Reformers to create a Protestant Church, but rather a reformed English Catholic Church. For this reason, certain Mediaeval abuses which were seen to have crept into the Liturgy had to be reformed, and yet whatever of the past could be retained was retained. So the 1549 Rite was a moderate reform, and would have been familiar to those who had used the Sarum Rite, albeit now in English.

As often happens with compromises, many of the more reform-minded (Protestant) Anglicans found the 1549 BCP “too catholic”, while many of those who preferred the pre-reformation rites, found the book “too Protestant.” And in fact the 1549 Prayer Book was replaced very shortly with the second Prayer Book of 1552, which revised the Liturgy in a

Protestant direction, while the 1559 and 1662 editions, both issued under Elizabeth I, moved public prayer back on to a more catholic track.

Before our worship begins, and instead of the sermon today, I'd like to briefly say a few words of introduction about the 1549 Communion Rite. The first thing you will notice is the title: "The Supper of the Lord, and The Holy Communion, commonly called The Mass." "The Supper of the Lord" was a Protestant term for the Eucharist, while "The Mass" hearkened back to the pre-reformation liturgies. In the use of both terms, we see an attempt to marry these two traditions. The word Mass is not a crypto-Roman import as many Episcopalians believe, but rather has been with Anglicanism from the very beginning.

In the same vein, The Peace, which was seen to be a "new thing" in the 1979 Prayer Book, is likewise of great antiquity, being found in liturgies dating as far back the New Testament era. The 1549 BCP included The Peace, although it was a simple greeting and response without any accompanying gesture such as a handshake. It was also exchanged at a

different point in the Liturgy—just after the Consecration. Interestingly enough, the modern Roman Catholic Rite maintains the more ancient position as reflected in the First Prayer Book.

In the opening rubrics (or rules), we read that that the clergy were to wear “a vestment”—meaning a chasuble—or “a Cope.” In contrast to the Continental reformers, the English Church retained the traditional Eucharistic vestments, as well as church furnishings such as stained glass, often smashed by the more radical continental reformers as “graven images.”

In the same way, on the Continent, the altars were removed from the churches on the grounds that an “altar” implied that the Eucharist was a real sacrifice (which of course it is), and were replaced with much less elaborate “communion tables,” more in keeping with the Protestant idea of the Lord’s Supper as a bare commemorative meal. Moreover, on the Continent, the communion table would often be put into storage on the forty-eight or so Sundays when it was not used as a place to pile hats,

coats and books. Instead the pulpit took position front and center. In England, the altars were retained, and they were kept in the place of prominence.

The use of two candles on the altar was in keeping with the Sarum Rite, which likewise used only two candles. Our modern use of six candles, now almost universal in Episcopal Churches of the anglo-catholic stripe, comes from Tridentine Roman Catholic practice, and only became customary in Anglicanism in the nineteenth century.

By outwardly maintaining familiar forms, Cranmer hoped to establish the practice of weekly congregational Communion, and included exhortations to encourage this; and instructions that Communion should never be received by the priest alone. This represented a radical change from late medieval practice—whereby the primary focus of congregational worship was attendance at the consecration, and adoration of the elevated Consecrated Host. In late medieval England, the faithful only regularly received Communion at Easter; and otherwise

individual lay people might expect to receive Communion only when on their deathbeds, or in the form of a Nuptial Mass on being married.

While retaining the idea of a real consecration of the bread and wine into the Body and Blood of Christ, the 1549 Prayer Book ordered that there be no elevation of the Host and Chalice, and Sanctus bells would not have been used.

Much of the wording of the 1549 Rite will be familiar to those who grew up with the 1928 Prayer Book, or who attend the 7:45am Rite I Mass here at St James.’ As was the case until the 1979 Prayer Book in the Episcopal Church, only two lessons are read: an Epistle and a Gospel with a short snippet of the psalms placed in between. In 1549, both readings would have been read by the clergy, but today we will have the first lesson read by a lay person as is our custom.

The Gospel procession, where there was one, was much shorter, and the Gospel itself was read facing the liturgical North, a custom that

developed in the primitive Church to symbolize the need to preach the Gospel to the Barbarian tribes that lived on the northern borders of the Roman Empire.

The 1549 Prayer Book ordered that women and children sit on the right hand of the church, and the men on the left. Acolytes, which were preserved in the first Prayer Book, were exclusively male. We will not be observing these customs this morning.

The Sermon, if there was one, followed the Creed, reversing the order that we are used to. I say, “if there was one,” because in the volatile reformation-era, only certain clergy were licensed to preach for fear that non-approved theological or political sentiments might be expressed by the preacher. Those who did not hold a license to preach were bound to read one of the lengthy sermons out of the officially sanctioned Book of Homilies. We will not be observing that custom this morning either.

Mass was said with the priest facing towards the East, as it was in every Episcopal and Roman Catholic Church before the liturgical reforms of

Second Vatican Council in the 1960s, and is still done so in some.

Regardless of its true geographical orientation, the altar is always said to be in the “East End” of the Church, facing the place of the rising sun (s-u-n), the place of light, from whence the risen Son (s-o-n) will return at his glorious Second Coming. Instead of thinking that the priest is “saying Mass with his back to the people” we should instead think of the priest and people facing the same way. When the priest speaks *to God* on behalf of the people, he faces towards the East, but when he speaks *to the people* on behalf of God, he faces the faithful. It can be a powerful symbol, even today.

You will also note that there are no hymns in this service. Hymns make a rather late appearance on the liturgical scene, and the idea of setting poetry to music (which is what a hymn is!) was seen as radically inappropriate to dignified worship. Most of the hymns that we call “traditional” are in fact no more than two-hundred years old. It is the Methodist movement of the eighteenth century that can be credited with

introducing hymns into worship. Instead, the service would have been sung by “lay clerks,” men and boys attached to cathedrals, college chapels and other large churches, a custom still seen in the cathedral choirs of the Church of England. Organs would have been used in such churches, in contrast to the Continent, where in many places the organs were destroyed as being “popish.” Traditional liturgical chant was likewise retained in the Church of England, although radically simplified.

To our sensibilities, the 1549 Communion Service has little congregational participation. Many of the prayers that we are accustomed to saying together—the Our Father, the General Confession, and the Prayer of Humble Access—are said by the priest alone. But if you consider that in the Latin Sarum Rite, there was *no* congregational input, Cranmer’s Prayer Book would have seemed downright democratic!

So a brief introduction to First Prayer Book. Remember that while we are using a historic liturgy, we are not play acting, but rather offering the

same sacrifice of praise and thanksgiving that we do each Lord's day, but in the words and manner of our forerunners in the faith. As always, the goal of our worship is to do everything in good order to praise and magnify God, and edify our fellow believers.