

## **Views from the Pews: the Shape of the Liturgy Part 1**

The Eucharist (thanksgiving) is a drama. It might be described as a “one-act participatory drama in 8 Scenes”. It is firmly based in scripture and something in the order of 80% of the rite consists of the words of scripture and perhaps more than half of it is designed for active congregational participation.

In this piece we concentrate on the service found on page 404 of the NZ Prayerbook. The service follows reasonably closely the service of Holy Communion in the 1662 Prayer Book which itself closely follows that of 1549. We can think of the overall structure of the drama as being like climbing a mountain. Although there are plateaus on the journey, we reach the summit in the act of communion. While there are scene changes as the service unfolds, there is no half time, and we should take care to see that the thread of the service is not disrupted.

Scene 1 sees the gathering of the community. There is an exchange of greetings with the congregation and the prayer seeking purity of intention followed by the Gloria, that great shout of praise. It is interesting that the rubric allows for the Gloria to be said or sung after the absolution that occurs in Scene 2. In the 1662 Book of Common Prayer, the Gloria came at the end of the service in what was sometimes described as the dislocated canon”.

Scene 2 is penitential. In it we hear a summary of the Mosaic law, and Jesus’ teaching of the “new commandment”. Now we confess our shortcomings and ask for forgiveness and the celebrant declares the absolution assuring us of the forgiveness of God that is available to those whose confession is genuine.

(To be continued)  
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