

Forms of Ancient Christian Worship

The Didache

This is one of the oldest known works of Christian literature outside of the New Testament. In fact, it was likely written in the late 1st century, which would make it contemporaneous with John's Revelation and perhaps his Gospel. While the first half of this treatise deals with Christian behavior, the second half deals with elements of Christian worship.

Chapter 7: Concerning Baptism

And concerning baptism, baptize this way: Having first said all these things, baptize into the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit, in living water. But if you have no living water, baptize into other water; and if you cannot do so in cold water, do so in warm. But if you have neither, pour out water three times upon the head into the name of Father and Son and Holy Spirit. But before the baptism let the baptizer fast, and the baptized, and whoever else can; but you shall order the baptized to fast one or two days before.

Chapter 8: Fasting & Prayer

But let not your fasts be with the hypocrites, for they fast on the second and fifth day of the week. Rather, fast on the fourth day and the Preparation (Friday). Do not pray like the hypocrites, but rather as the Lord commanded in His Gospel, like this:
Our Father who art in heaven, hallowed be Thy name. Thy kingdom come. Thy will be done on earth, as it is in heaven. Give us today our daily (needful) bread, and forgive us our debt as we also forgive our debtors. And bring us not into temptation, but deliver us from the evil one (or, evil); for Thine is the power and the glory for ever..
Pray this three times each day.

Chapter 9: The Eucharist

Now concerning the Eucharist, give thanks this way. First, concerning the cup:
We thank thee, our Father, for the holy vine of David Thy servant, which You madest known to us through Jesus Thy Servant; to Thee be the glory for ever..
And concerning the broken bread:
We thank Thee, our Father, for the life and knowledge which You madest known to us through Jesus Thy Servant; to Thee be the glory for ever. Even as this broken bread was scattered over the hills, and was gathered together and became one, so let Thy Church be gathered together from the ends of the earth into Thy kingdom; for Thine is the glory and the power through Jesus Christ for ever..
But let no one eat or drink of your Eucharist, unless they have been baptized into the name of the Lord; for concerning this also the Lord has said, "Give not that which is holy to the dogs."

Chapter 10: After the Eucharist

But after you are filled, give thanks this way:
We thank Thee, holy Father, for Thy holy name which You didst cause to tabernacle in our hearts, and for the knowledge and faith and immortality, which You modest known to us through Jesus Thy Servant; to Thee be the glory for ever. Thou, Master almighty, didst create all things for Thy name's sake; You gavest food and drink to men for enjoyment, that they might give thanks to Thee; but to us You didst freely give spiritual food and drink and life eternal through Thy Servant. Before all things we thank Thee that You are mighty; to Thee be the glory for ever. Remember, Lord, Thy Church, to deliver it from all evil and to make it perfect in Thy love, and gather it from the four winds, sanctified for Thy kingdom which Thou have prepared for it; for Thine is the power and the glory for ever. Let grace come, and let this world pass away. Hosanna to the God (Son) of David! If any one is holy, let him come; if any one is not so, let him repent. Maranatha. Amen.
But permit the prophets to make Thanksgiving as much as they desire.

Chapter 14: Christian Assembly on the Lord's Day

But every Lord's day gather yourselves together, and break bread, and give thanksgiving after having confessed your transgressions, that your sacrifice may be pure. But let no one who is at odds with his fellow come together with you, until they be reconciled, that your sacrifice may not be profaned. For this is that which was spoken by the Lord: "In every place and time offer to me a pure sacrifice; for I am a great King, says the Lord, and my name is wonderful among the nations."

The Apostolic Tradition, by Hippolytus

This work, attributed to Hippolytus of Rome, was written and/or collected in the first 400 years of the church, the earlier option being around 200AD. It most clearly survives in Egyptian and Ethiopic texts. It is a directive of early church polity and order, with large sections dedicated to installation of officers and the welcoming catechumens. Early churches often relied on repeated liturgies to aid in participation, and the below dialogue preceded the taking of Communion.

Chapter 4: The Prayer Before the Eucharist

1 When he has been made bishop, everyone shall give him the kiss of peace, and salute him respectfully, for he has been made worthy of this. 2 Then the deacons shall present the oblation to him, and he shall lay his hand upon it, and give thanks, with the entire council of elders, saying:

3 The Lord be with you.

And all reply: And with your spirit.

The bishop says: Lift up your hearts.

The people respond: We have them with the Lord.

The bishop says: Let us give thanks to the Lord.

The people respond: It is proper and just.

The bishop then continues:

4 We give thanks to you God, through your beloved son Jesus Christ, whom you sent to us in former times as a Savior, Redeemer, and Messenger of your Will, 5 who is your inseparable Word, through whom you made all, and in whom you were well-pleased, 6 whom you sent from heaven into the womb of a virgin, who, being conceived within her, was made flesh, and appeared as your Son, born of the Holy Spirit and the virgin.

7 It is he who, fulfilling your will and acquiring for you a holy people, extended his hands in suffering, in order to liberate from sufferings those who believe in you. 8 Who, when he was delivered to voluntary suffering, in order to dissolve death, and break the chains of the devil, and tread down hell, and bring the just to the light, and set the limit, and manifest the resurrection, 9 taking the bread, and giving thanks to you, said, "Take, eat, for this is my body which is broken for you." Likewise the chalice, saying, This is my blood which is shed for you.

10 Whenever you do this, do this (in) memory of me.

11 Therefore, remembering his death and resurrection, we offer to you the bread and the chalice, giving thanks to you, who has made us worthy to stand before you and to serve as your priests.

12 And we pray that you would send your Holy Spirit to the oblation of your Holy Church. In their gathering together, give to all those who partake of your holy mysteries the fullness of the Holy Spirit, toward the strengthening of the faith in truth, 13 that we may praise you and glorify you, through your son Jesus Christ, through whom to you be glory and honor, Father and Son, with the Holy Spirit, in your Holy Church, now and throughout the ages of the ages. Amen.