

Holy Communion in a City Church.

THE Service of Holy Communion is here considered from the point of an officiating Elder who has many times enjoyed the high privilege of actively assisting at the Celebration, and who is keenly desirous that such services should engage the earnest attention of all who, like him, are so highly honoured.

There are two considerations, it may be said, which ought to receive attention in the conduct of the Service of Holy Communion. These are—first, that the service should in the highest degree express our devotion and our earnest acceptance of “His most inestimable benefit”; and second, that from beginning to end the arrangements should be so thought out and perfected beforehand so that there should be no hitch or failure in the prompt discharge of appointed duty which might distract the thoughts of any worshipper. The chief charge must rest upon the Minister officiating, and an earnest man must feel this to be a highly responsible and solemn task, but there are details in which he can be greatly assisted by the Elders who are disposed to take an active and true-hearted interest in the service itself, and to help in carrying it out along the lines already agreed upon.

In detailing the method in our Parish Church it may be best to begin with the Service of Admission of First Communicants. This takes place at least twice a year—viz.: in the evening of the Friday preceding the Easter and Autumn Communions. The young people—for they are for the most part young—who have been under instruction by one of the Ministers for some weeks are placed in order in the front pews. After the sermon the Minister descends from the pulpit and as their names are read out they stand up; and then the whole congregation rises to repeat with them the Apostles’ Creed. The young people remain standing while they are briefly addressed by the Minister upon the importance of the step in life which they are about to take. The usual questions having been put and answered, they are then led forward by the Beadle, four at a time, to the steps in front of the Holy Table, and while they kneel there

the solemn words of Confirmation are said and hands are laid on the head of each: "Defend, O Lord, this Thy servant with Thy heavenly grace, that *he* may continue Thine for ever; and daily increase in Thy Holy Spirit more and more, until *he* come unto Thy everlasting Kingdom."

Meantime the Elders in the apse, round the Table, are also standing, thus showing that while the active part of the ceremony of admission is in the hands of the Minister, the act is an act of the Session. It is for this reason largely that the Session is constituted previously to the beginning of the Service, and remains undischarged until the close of the Sunday Services. After the Benediction has been pronounced, the Minister and Elders, followed by the Catechumens, proceed to the Memorial Chapel, where they are welcomed into the membership of the Church in a few words from one of the Elders, chosen beforehand for this duty. All the members of Session present then give to each the right hand of fellowship as they file out to receive their cards of membership and Token cards for the approaching Celebration.

At the Communion Service on the Sunday forenoon there are certain minor differences from the ordinary diet of worship—*e.g.*, the omission of an Anthem—and the offering is made before the sermon. As in most other Churches at the conclusion of the sermon the Minister announces the 35th Paraphrase and gives an invitation to the members of any branch of the Church of Christ who happen to be present, bidding them heartily welcome to the Table—since it is not the Table of this Church but the Table of Our Lord. One cannot help remarking in passing how much more Christian in spirit this is than any process of exclusion on account of the worshipper not belonging to some particular sect. If we of the Church of Scotland are, as we claim to be, members of the Church Catholic, surely this invitation is on right lines and should never be omitted.

While the Paraphrase is being sung the Clergy and Elders proceed to the Memorial Chapel at the west end of the Church where the Elements are prepared.

After prayer the Session Clerk announces the order of procession, which is led by the two Beadles duly robed and carrying maces. The Ministers go first followed by 19 Elders of whom 6 carry 6 Patens, 10 carry 19 Cups, and 3 carry 3 Flagons. As they proceed the congregation

continues singing the Paraphrase, or on Easter Day the Psalm xxiv., 7, to the well-known tune, "S. George's, Edinburgh." Each Elder has been given printed instructions and thus knows his duty precisely, both as regards the pews where he is to serve communicants, and also as to the exact place on the Table where he is to deposit the Cup or Paten of which he has charge. This latter may seem a small matter, but when the number of the vessels is considered it will be realised that strict care and attention are required to obviate any confusion or untidiness on the Table. It is of vital importance that all should be done reverently, orderly, and silently. The Elders, having placed the vessels on the Table, which is of marble covered with a fine linen cloth, pass on to their appointed places in the apse. The first act of the Minister is to bless the congregation, saying, "The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the Communion of the Holy Ghost be with you all," and thus the great service of fellowship begins. The Elders and the congregation remain standing while the words of the Institution are read, and the great confession of the Nicene Creed is recited by all. At the close of the Eucharistic Prayer the Minister, having partaken himself, gives the Communion to the Ministers who are assisting him, and then to two (previously selected) Elders who kneel at a convenient place near to the Table; then these two, receiving the Paten and Cup at the hands of the Celebrant, serve the other Elders in the apse. When these have partaken the Minister hands the Patens and Cups to those who carry the Elements to the congregation in the Church, and in the act of doing so he says: "The Body of the Lord Jesus Christ which was given for thee preserve thy body and soul unto everlasting life. . . . The Blood of our Lord Jesus Christ, which was shed for thee, preserve thy body and soul unto everlasting life. Drink this in remembrance that Christ's blood was shed for thee and be thankful." At the last October Communion the Communicants numbered 1432 at the morning Celebration and 582 in the afternoon.

When all the worshippers have been served, the Elders gather in the west vestibule of the Church and, having seemly covered the remaining Elements with the napkins, enter in procession and convey the Vessels to the Table when they are deposited in the same order. As they enter the Church with the Bread and Wine the congrega-

tion rises and remains standing. Then the Minister says : "The peace of the Lord Jesus Christ be with you all." After prayer and the singing of Psalm ciii., verses 1-4, to the tune "Coleshill," the Benediction concludes the Service. The Ministers and Elders bearing the Elements then leave the Church ; the Choir follow singing as they go the *Nunc Dimittis*, the congregation standing meanwhile.

I have thus described the details of the mode of conducting this most Holy Service as it is carried out in the particular Church referred to, not from any desire to suggest that that method is incapable of improvement or is in essentials superior to the mode in use in some other Churches, but rather with the idea of recounting how it may be done where Ministers and Elders are alike deeply impressed with the glory, the beauty, the solemnity, and the joy of the Holy Eucharist, and all are alike desirous to contribute to it that whole-hearted devotion and undivided attention which are so essential ; and particularly so where a large body of worshippers have to be served and welcomed to the Holy Table at one time. Minister and Elders realise that each has his own part to play, his own function to carry out. Those functions are not the same, but each realises that he is a living and an integral part, and that without him the service cannot be made perfect. The function of the Minister is obvious and is often dealt with : that of the Elder is less important no doubt, but with fervour and goodwill he can do much to assist in making the service a complete, harmonious, and reverent whole. If we Elders had no function in the Church other than this, even then we would be entrusted with a high office,—to convey to the people the sacred symbols, and it is well worth our while to see to it that we magnify this office and give it our earnest consideration.

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