

# The Church from Age to Age

*Life & Worship in the Early Church, A.D. 60–250*

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## Worship Space

The prefect Rusticus said: “Where do you meet together?”

Justin said: “Where each wills and can. Do you really think that we all meet in the same place? Not so: for the God of the Christians is not confined by place, but being unseen fills heaven and earth, and is worshipped and glorified by the faithful everywhere.”

The prefect Rusticus said: “Tell me, where do ye meet, or in what place do you gather your disciples?”

Justin said: “I lodge above in the house of Martin, near the baths of Timothy, and during all this time (this is my second visit to Rome) I have known no other place of meeting but this house. And if any wished to come to me, I imparted to him the word of truth.” (*Acts of SS. Justin and His Companions*).

## Baptism

Now concerning baptism, baptize as follows: after you have reviewed all these things, baptize “in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit” in running water. But if you have no running water, then baptize in some other water; and if you are not able to baptize in cold water, then do so in warm. But if you have neither, then pour water in the head three times “in the name of Father and Son and Holy Spirit.” And before baptism, let the one baptizing and the one who is to be baptized fast, as well as any others who are able. (*Didache*, 7)

When he who is being baptized goes down into the water, he who baptizes him, putting his hands on him, shall say thus: Dost thou believe in God, the Father Almighty? And he who is being baptized shall say: I believe. Then holding his hand placed on his head, he shall baptize him once... (*Hippolytus, Apostolic Tradition*, 21)

## Sunday Eucharist

*The central act of the assembled Christian community was the Eucharist, or Holy Communion, celebrated by the Ancient Church every Sunday and on all festival days. (The Church from Age to Age, 116)*

On the Lord’s Day assemble and break bread and give thanks, having first confessed your sins, that your sacrifice may be pure (*Didache*, 14)

On the day called Sunday there is a meeting in one place of those who live in cities or the country, and the memoirs of the apostles or the writings of the prophets are read as long as time permits. When the reader has finished, the president urges and incites us in a discourse to imitate these noble things. Then we stand up together and offer prayers. After prayer, bread is brought, and wine and water, and the president similarly offers up prayers and thanksgiving to the best of his ability. The congregation assents, saying the Amen. The distribution and reception of the consecrated elements by each one takes place and they are sent to those who are absent by the deacons. (*Justin Martyr, First Apology*).

And when he is made bishop, all shall offer him the kiss of peace, for he has been made worthy. To him then the deacons shall bring the offering, and he, laying his hand upon it, with all the presbytery, shall say the thanksgiving: The Lord be with you.

And all shall say: And with thy spirit.

Lift up your hearts.

We lift them up to the Lord.

Let us give thanks to the Lord.  
It is meet and right.

And then the offering is immediately brought by the deacons to the bishop, and by thanksgiving he shall make the bread into an image of the body of Christ, and the cup of the wine mixed with water according to the likeness of the blood, which is shed for all who believe in Him...The bishop shall explain the reason of all these things to those who partake. And when he breaks the bread and distributes the fragments he shall say: The heavenly bread in Christ Jesus. And the recipient shall say, Amen. (Hippolytus, *Apostolic Tradition*, 4)

## Ministry

Let the bishop be ordained after he has been chosen by all the people. When he has been named and shall please all, let him, with the presbytery and such bishops as may be present, assemble with the people on a Sunday. While all give their consent, the bishops shall lay their hands upon him, and the presbytery shall stand by in silence (*Didache*).

## Catechumenate

New converts to the faith, who are to be admitted as hearers of the word, shall first be brought to the teachers, before the people assemble. And they shall be examined as to their reasons for embracing the faith, and they who bring them shall testify that they are competent to hear the word. Inquiry shall be made as to the nature of their life. Let catechumens spend three years as hearers of the word. (Hippolytus, *The Apostolic Tradition*).

## Christians and Society

We are a new group but we have already penetrated all areas of imperial life—cities, islands, villages, towns, marketplaces, even the camp, tribes, palace, senate, the lawcourt. There is nothing left for you but your temples... We live in the world with you. We do not forsake forum... or bath...or workshop, or inn, or market, or any other place of commerce. We sail with you, fight with you, farm with you... (Tertullian, *Apology*, 42).

People ask whether a baptized Christian can become a soldier or whether a soldier may be admitted to the faith... Even if soldiers did come to John, and the centurion did believe, the Lord himself unbelted every soldier when He took the sword away from Peter. (Tertullian, *On Idolatry*, 19)

They carouse in affected manner going through many indecent movements; your sons and daughters behold them giving lessons in adultery on the stage (Tatian, *Oration*, 23).

How can I paint the happiness in a marriage that the church ratifies, the celebration of Communion confirms, the benediction seals...? What a union!... They pray together, fast together, instruct, exhort, and support each other... They share each other's tribulation, persecution, and revival... They delight to visit the sick, help the needy, give alms freely... Christ rejoices when he hears and sees this. (Tertullian, *To Wife*, 2:8)