**LITURGY**

**Part One**

St Cyprian’s 2/28/16

Pastor Deena Galantowicz

Every Sunday when we gather to worship together, we participate in the LITURGY of the Episcopal Church…our way of worship. So Fr. Ted and I thought it would be helpful to have some time today and next Sunday to consider why we do what we do in our worship. Actually, the word *liturgy* means “the work of the people.” It’s what we do when we come to church. Our work, our worship, our service, as the people of God, is to offer ourselves and our substance and our praises as an offering in great thanksgiving for our gift of God’s Love made known to us in the life and death of Jesus. We are called a Liturgical church, and so is the Lutheran church, the Roman Catholic Church and the Orthodox churches, because our offering, the sacrifice of the Eucharist or the Mass is central to our worship life. In more Protestant churches, Methodist, Baptist, Presbyterian, etc., this is not the case. The Eucharist is relegated to a sometimes meal of remembrance and the Bible is central.

Since for us Episcopalians, our primary liturgy IS the Holy Eucharist, let’s focus on that. Please feel free to turn to page 355 in the Book of Common Prayer; it may help you to follow along. Our liturgy of the Holy Eucharist consists of two parts: First) The Proclamation of the Word of God, and Second) the Holy Communion, and these two parts pivot at the Peace…we’ll see why later. This morning we will look more closely at the first half of our Eucharistic Service and then next Sunday we will consider the second half: The Holy Communion.

We begin with the *Opening Acclamation*. Since we are now in the church season of Lent, we use the sentences for this penitential season, but for most of the Church year, the priest begins with the words, “Blessed be God: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.” And we respond: “And Blessed be his kingdom, now and forever. Amen” Amen which simply means “So Be it.” This, in a nutshell, is the whole of worship, namely that God is to be blessed by his created ones. Later our Eucharistic Prayer says, “In your infinite love you made us for yourself…” Just think of that… we say…”In your infinite LOVE you made us for yourself!” How much more special can we know ourselves to be!

Then the *Collect for Purity*. A Collect is a short prayer that makes one request of God, and usually places that request in the context of who God is, what God has done. Nearly all collects are only one sentence long. They sum up petitions that we might like to make of God at the point in the service where they occur. The *Collect for Purity* is exactly appropriate for the beginning of the liturgy…because we ask for pure hearts, before we even think of presuming to proceed.

Next is either the *Gloria* or, in Penitential times like now, we use the *Kyrie*, the whole title of which is Kyrie eleison which means Lord, have mercy. Each of these, but the Gloria especially, are canticles or songs of pure worship.

Then we have the *Collect of the Day*. This is a wonderful prayer that sums up the focus of the day and the music and the scripture readings. And it begins with the ancient Christian greeting of “The Lord be with you” and the response “And also with you.” Again it is usually one long sentence. Pay attention to the Collect of the Day because it strikes the note, the theme, for the entire liturgy of the day. It is called The Collect of the Day because it changes each Sunday. I always think that if anyone lets their attention wander during the service, it shouldn’t be at The Collect of the Day.

Next: The reading of *Scripture* which has been central to Christian worship from the start, deriving as it does from Hebrew worship. Our Prayer Book includes significant portions of the Bible every time we worship. We have a reading from the Old Testament and the Psalms and from the New Testament and the Gospels. You may know that the Gospel readings are arranged in a three year cycle called Year A, Year B and year C. The gospel readings in Year A are from the Gospel of Matthew. In Year B they are from Mark and in year C, which we are in now, from Luke. John’s Gospel is read on special occasions like Easter in any of the three years in the cycle. This ensures that much of the Bible will be read over a three year period. In case you didn’t know, the Psalms are the one part of our Holy Scripture that is also Holy Scripture in the other monotheistic religions: Judaism and Islam.

The reading of the Gospel is the high point of this section of the liturgy because in the Gospel we hear about Our Lord’s own words and stories of his ministry, teaching and healing. That is why we stand, and why we turn to face the Gospel Book, and that is why we have a Gospel procession symbolizing that the Good News of Jesus is being taken out among the people.

Then the *Sermon* is preached with the intention of expanding or interpreting the words that have been heard up to this point, after which we stand to profess our faith through the words of the *Creed*. The word Creed comes from the Latin “credo” which means “I believe.” The shorter of the two creeds we use is the Apostles’ Creed which we say at Baptisms. The other, the Nicene Creed, which we say most Sundays, gets its name from the city of Nicaea where bishops and theologians met in the fourth century to deal with some thorny problems and heresies facing the church. Many of us know these creeds by heart, and proclaim them as our connection with Christians through the ages.

Next: the *Prayers of the People*. The Prayer Book gives us several options, but the forms all include intercessions for the world, for the Church, for our community, for our own church, for those who have died and for any special needs we may have. The forms for these prayers are drawn from very ancient intercessions used in the earliest Church. The Prayers of the People is a most important part of our liturgy. I really hope some of you do experience that in these prayers, as with the Sacraments themselves, we find ourselves right in that mystical place between heaven and earth, between time and eternity. Remember that the mystery of prayer goes all the way back to the beginning of time,… AND WE HAVE BEEN COMMANDED TO PRAY....very fitting as Christ-ians…followers of Christ.

Next is the *Confession.* Private, personal confession, where we name our sins, is a necessary part of any Christian’s spiritual life, and we only kid ourselves if we don’t do this. But, our beautiful liturgy, our prayer book worship, gives us the opportunity to offer our confession, though keeping the particulars personal and in our hearts, but to offer all of this within the Body of Christ, the church, and that reality, different from any other hour in our week, places us plunk in the midst of the right attitude by saying what is true…namely, that we HAVE sinned in thought, word, and deed, and that we need God’s forgiveness. I guess because the Episcopal Church has the biggest collection of ex Roman Catholics, I also need to say this. The Priest does not forgive the sins. The word “absolution“ refers to the declaration that we, being penitent, are forgiven by God, not by the clergy. …the Priest is NOT a mediator whom the church has interposed between Christ and his people.

We now exchange the *peace*. If we have been genuine in our confession and we have accepted the priest telling us that our sins are forgiven, we are now in a rather pure state and what more could we ever wish for one another at that moment than that we all know God’s peace, that peace that passes all understanding!

SO - it is no wonder that this is the PIVOTAL moment in our Liturgy. How perfect!! The Peace!! Here ends the first half, the Liturgy of the Word. Tune in next week to the second half, THE Great Thanksgiving!

LITURGY

Part TWO

St. Cyprian’s 3/6/16

Pastor Deena Galanotwicz

Worship is THE most important thing we do as a church. Our Liturgy, our worship structure, dates to pre-Christian practices in the synagogues. Last week and this week we are following along in The Book of Common Prayer, which we are using all through this church season of Lent, but there are other forms of worship that have also been authorized for use by the Episcopal Church, including some familiar to you if you have been worshipping here at St. Cyprian’s for a while. For example, in some other seasons of the Church Year we use some wonderfully inspirational Prayers from the Moravian Book of Worship and from the New Zealand Prayer Book.

Last Sunday I mentioned that the word liturgy means “the work of the people.” Our work, our service, as the people of God, is to offer ourselves and our praises as an oblation, or an offering, to God. It is significant that when we come to the most important occasions in our lives, we reach for ceremony. All cultures do this. Think of the rituals we have around marriage and when a death has occurred. These are mysteries, and so we feel a need for ceremony and ritual. In worship we approach the highest mystery of all, namely God. And so we have a structure, with the words which we sing and say, actually setting us free for our own thoughts and prayers; they become ritualistic pathways, avenues for worship. Our liturgy is a glorious unfolding of significant actions, with one part leading to the next. It is Opera really!

Sacrament is the Latin word for “mystery.” In the sacraments the unseen touches the seen. Physical things become the point where the eternal breaks through. The sacraments are not magic, but neither are they to be reasoned through. They are, precisely, mysteries. . We are neither required nor able to understand them. If this were the Roman Catholic Church we would declare that the bread and wine of the Holy Eucharist, through the consecration, BECOME the Body and Blood of Christ…that transubstantiation has occurred. However, we are Episcopalians and we know that the Eucharist is a mystery and we live with that. Rather than try to explain it, our theology is that we believe in the Mystical Real Presence of Christ in the consecrated elements. That is why we are so carefully reverent about communion… of being mindful of what a gift we are receiving when we come forward for communion. The power of this experience does not depend on our being able to explain why or how it happens. That is also why it is just fine for little ones to receive communion. In my experience, no matter how young the child, when they come to the altar rail at communion time, they have a sense that this is very special…and so do we adults. They don’t understand it, but neither do we. We only know that they and we are mysteriously fed spiritually and that’s all we need to know, except perhaps gratitude.

“Eucharist” is a Greek word meaning “thanksgiving” and it refers to the Lord’s Table or the Holy Communion or the Mass. It is a good word because it is ancient and it crosses all sectarian lines. It strikes a note that sometimes gets lost…that this holy meal is a time of great joy. The attitude which marked the early Christians’ gathering for this feast was overridingly one of joy and thanksgiving. “Christ our Passover is sacrificed for us.” “Therefore let us keep the feast!” They…and WE exclaim.

As I said last Sunday, the liturgy of the Holy Eucharist consists of two parts: the Liturgy of the Word of God and the Holy Communion and they pivot at the Peace. Last week we considered The Liturgy of the Word, the first half, which has the Opening Acclamation, the Collect for Purity ,the Gloria or in Penitential times, the Kyrie, the Collect of the Day, the Scripture readings, the sermon, the Creed, the Prayers of the People, the Confession of Sin and the Absolution. And Then… Ta Da! Our pivot moment…We exchange the peace. After our communal confession and absolution, we now wish for one another God’s peace, that peace that passes all understanding! And here I must say…this Holy moment is NOT the time to invite someone for dinner, or to give an update on our health issues or exchange our thoughts about the latest political debate. It is the Holy Moment when we wish for the other that they may know God’s Peace. Nothing should detract from that.

We turn now to the second half, the Liturgy of the Eucharist, THE Great Thanksgiving! In the early church, outsiders and unbaptized believers were dismissed at the end of the Liturgy of the Word and the company of baptized faithful gathered at the Lord’s Table for the Eucharist, the thanksgiving itself. How blessed we are here at St. Cyprian’s that ALL are welcome at the Holy Table. This is our HOLY COMMUNION…and think of those words….Holy or … Sacred Com union…or union with…Holy Union With or Holy Communion. For us Episcopalians, our primary liturgy IS Holy Eucharist. It is the most precious legacy that Christ has left us. In sharing in our Holy Communion the intention is that we become inextricably one with God, and in God, through Christ, with our brothers and sisters. And through God…and through this mystical union in Christ with one another, we become one with our innermost being, one with our divine center. That is the hope.

So now to page 361 if you want to follow along. We begin with the Offertory our offering, and note that this is not a collection; rather it is an offering, which, along with the bread and wine, represents ourselves, our lives, and ideally, the first fruits of our labor. That is why we all stand when all of this is being taken up to the altar and there offered as representative of all that we are and all that we have. The plates are not collection plates, they are Offering Plates, or in times past, called Alms Basins…meaning our offering for the relief of the poor.

Next, the Proper Preface comes just before the Sanctus, which is the Holy, Holy, Holy. This Preface, like the Collect of the Day, varies according to the season of the church year. At Christmas, for example, the words turn our attention to the Incarnation, but now, since we are in the Church season of Lent, the words have to do with our Lord’s sacrifice for us.

And don’t you love the words that lead into the Sanctus…”Therefore WE praise you, joining our voices with angels and archangels and all the company of heaven, who forever sing this hymn”. Think of it……….my mom, maybe your mom, a daughter, Dad, best friends, those whom we love but see no more…all the company of heaven.

The Sanctus ends with the Benedictus, which is Latin for “blessed” and it comes from the acclamation of the crowd in Jerusalem on Palm Sunday: “Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord.” It is our greeting to Jesus who now comes to us in the holy Sacrament of the Eucharist. Some people make the sign of the cross here. It is a gesture which denotes our awareness that we now approach the holiest of all.

Then the Prayer of Consecration. In this prayer the church addresses God, recalling first of all the great acts of creation and redemption in which God’s love for us is disclosed. The actual Consecration is when we say the specific details of the Last Supper, taken directly from the Bible. The Church believes that in the entirety of the liturgy we are in the presence of the mystery that Jesus invited his disciples to participate in at the Last Supper. When the priest says the words of Jesus… “This is My Body…This is My Blood” …the point is not that a magic spell has suddenly taken effect. Rather, we have another profound mystical experience: We see the Church as Christ’s Body remembering, proclaiming, and presenting his “once-for-all” Offering. WE have no greater offering. That is why the word “remember” which we say, is so perfect, because it is not just an idea that returns to mind. Rather it is as if a limb, a member, is rejoined, reunited, reattached, RE-Membered. Our liturgy then is the enacting in a particular time, in a particular place, the fixed, eternal reality of the Good News of God in Christ.

At this point we all join in saying some version of “Christ has died. Christ is risen. Christ will come again.” Think about it. We say “Christ IS risen. Notice the IS! Not…was or has. Not past tense. But IS. He IS risen. He is among us…and don’t we know that…hopefully, at least every now and then. We go on to say that we are offering our gifts and ourselves and our worship to God.

The next paragraph in the prayer invokes the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit that we believe is Christ’s mystical presence among us, we ask to come upon these gifts and upon us also, so that what is intended when the Lord’s people meet at this Holy Table will in fact occur….Namely that holy people will partake of holy things. The source of holiness, God, sends the Holy Spirit to sanctify us, to make us holy. It is in the light of this, that, like the disciples at Emmaus after the resurrection, we may be said to know God in Jesus in the breaking of the bread,

I think of the entire liturgy as a prayer… but when we get to the Lord’s Prayer, it does seem that there is a very special connection with the communion of saints…and from very long ago to our own most recent additions to the heavenly realm. We can not do better than to pause and say it at this point and in every day of our lives. This prayer is such a gift to us. …I have experienced seemingly comatose persons moving their lips when I have offered The Lord’s Prayer…or, in a Nursing Home situation where a person doesn’t even seem aware of my presence…the same thing.

Then comes the moment of breaking the bread. Here we see THE great sign of divine Love: self-giving, sacrifice. Christ’s Body was broken as he was willing to give himself for the Life of the world….And he has called us…his people…now actually called his body, to be utterly self sacrificing as well. With our time and with our money. For the good of the rest of the family of God. …. You know, when we say “the gifts of God for the people of God” this is a true foreshadowing of heaven where the people of God live in the joy of all that God has given us. The Gifts of God for the People of God. Hear it! Think of it!

Then…we come forward, humbly, to receive this most precious gift. By coming forward we respond to our Lord’s invitation to come to his table. We kneel, not in fear or idolatry but in thanksgiving for all that our Lord and Saviour gave us and continues to give us.

We end this amazing one hour life-giving drama with the reminder that we are to go into the world now, to love and serve the Lord.

You will never see LITURGY better than as it is done in the Episcopal Church. I hope this will help you CHOOSE to come and worship over any other choice for a Sunday morning. And more than that, I hope you will experience the liturgy in a much richer way, far more mindful of how it all holds together as quite THE most important Drama we can ever be a part of, and with so much for us to draw on to change our foolish ways, to try for reconciliation where we need to, to find solace in our affliction, and to find peace in our sorrows.

COME AND WORSHIP. ..and then…Go, Be The Church!