

**ST. BARTHOLOMEW’S ANGLICAN CHURCH IN THE TOWN OF TONAWANDA**

The Rev. Fr. Arthur W. Ward, Jr. + Rector

Scripture: Various

***“Why the Liturgy?”***

**THE ANGLICAN TRADITION**

As many of you know, I was brought up in the Episcopal Church. At an early age, I realized quickly that in the Anglican tradition, there is a certain order to doing things. In fact, we do the same thing every week. We have a prescribed service found in what we call the Prayer Book. Everything is laid out for us. There are certain responses and actions expected of our members – whether it be kneeling, standing, speaking and singing, or coming forward to the altar to receive the Body and Blood of our Lord Jesus Christ. However, as a young boy, I felt the service was a bit tedious and cumbersome. I couldn’t wait to be dismissed to go to Sunday School after the reading of the Gospel. Why? Even though I believed in God and I knew church was important, I really didn’t understand what was going on. As I got older, as an acolyte in my junior and senior high years that I began to understand our service, but still much of the service left me dry. The sermons didn’t help either, as our rector tended to get bogged down in various subjects without much reference to the Bible. And I even felt at times that we were involved in vain repetition.

It wasn’t until my college years that I began to truly appreciate our tradition more fully. I began to appreciate it as I began to understand it. And eventually, I appreciated it so much that when the Lord called me into full-time ministry I was moved to not only go back into the Episcopal Church but to pursue ordination to the priesthood.

**BRINGING THE SERVICE TO LIFE**

One of the responsibilities of the priest is bring the church service to life. And one of the ways we do that is by explaining why we do what we do. For again when we understand such things we will not only gain insight but appreciation as well, and that may indeed lead to a more sincere and focused worship, which I believe is the desire of our Lord. Jesus said to the Samaritan woman in **John 4:24**, ***“God is spirit, and those who worship Him must worship in Spirit and Truth.”***

So what I would like to today and the next two Sundays is answer the question, “Why as Christians do we worship the way we do?” and then “Why as Anglicans do we worship the way we do?”

I have entitled the first sermon – “Why the liturgy?” Some may wonder what does the word, “liturgy,” mean? It is not a word you will hear outside of the church. In fact, you will only hear it predominately in Catholic Churches and some Lutheran Churches. Recall how last week we talked about the churches of the Catholic tradition – Roman, Orthodox, and Anglican. They trace their lineage back to the original apostles.

The term *liturgy* is taken from the Greek word, *leiturgia* and literally means the "work of the people." It was used originally to refer to any public work. The Jews, however, used it to refer to the services in the Temple and later the early Church used the term to refer to all the prescribed services of the church and specifically to the services of Holy Eucharist. .

And so those churches that are called, "liturgical," are such because their traditions and services have remained consistent over the centuries, and they have always placed an emphasis on the Lord's Supper – Holy Communion. Usually, there is also more lay participation required in liturgical churches as noted above.

However, in most Protestant Churches, a much more passive approach is taken. Outside of standing and singing songs and hymns, you stay seated almost the entire service – for the sermon, for the prayers, for the announcements, for special music. There is no kneeling, little verbal exchange of prayers, and no coming to the altar.

Now don't misunderstand, I am not putting down Protestant Churches. Many are Christ-centered and Bible-believing in their preaching and ministries. Many of these churches are making disciples for the Lord. But the way they conduct their services is different from "liturgical churches." As a result, they are often called "free" churches in that there is no real set order of service and specific prayers. In other words there is no traditional liturgy.

### **OLD TESTAMENT WORSHIP**

Of course, the most important purpose of a church service is to be a means to enter into the worship of the One True God. And if we are going to understand why we do the things we do as Christians and as Anglicans we need to look at what the people of God did in their worship from the beginning. Worship was ordained by God in creation when He rested on the seventh day and set it apart to be holy to the Lord and a day of rest for His people. Later He set more specific guidelines with Moses and the people of Israel after they were set free from their bondage in Egypt.

We find the following elements: There was a place of meeting – at first the tabernacle or Tent of Meeting, then the Temple, and then the synagogue. In the case of the first two, God gave specific instruction on how they were to be set up and made. Included in worship, was singing and musical instruments (I am reminded of what happened after the Temple was built, during its dedication we read from **2 Chr. 5:11-14**: *When the priests came forth from the holy place (for all the priests who were present had sanctified themselves, without regard to divisions), 12and all the Levitical singers, Asaph, Heman, Jeduthun, and their sons and kinsmen, clothed in fine linen, with cymbals, harps and lyres, standing east of the altar, and with them one hundred and twenty priests blowing trumpets 13in unison when the trumpeters and the singers were to make themselves heard with one voice to praise and to glorify the LORD, and when they lifted up their voice accompanied by trumpets and cymbals and instruments of music, and when they praised the LORD saying, "He indeed is good for His lovingkindness is everlasting," then the house, the house of the LORD, was filled with a cloud, 14so that*

*the priests could not stand to minister because of the cloud, for the glory of the LORD filled the house of God.)*

For the worship times, people brought offerings to God, some of which used by the priests and for poor, but also animals were presented to be sacrificed as a sin offering. In addition, prayers were said on behalf of the people, and there was spiritual instruction as the Torah and other parts of the Hebrew Bible were read. Synagogues came about after the destruction of the Temple. These were places of meeting for prayers, religious instruction and the reading of God's Word. The synagogue was a forerunner to our modern day churches.

### **NEW TESTAMENT WORSHIP**

How about in the New Testament? What did worship look like? In the New Testament church, there was no longer a Temple. Jesus became our temple. *Jesus said in Jn. 2:19-22: "Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up." 20The Jews then said, "It took forty-six years to build this temple, and will You raise it up in three days?" 21But He was speaking of the temple of His body. 22So when He was raised from the dead, His disciples remembered that He said this; and they believed the Scripture and the word which Jesus had spoken."*

There was no longer need for sacrifice of animals for sin, either. For Jesus is our sacrifice. After seeing Jesus, John the Baptist declared in **Jn. 1:29** , "*Behold, the lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world!*"

But there was still singing "*we are to teach and admonish one in another in psalms, hymns and spiritual songs, singing with thankfulness in our hearts to God,*" (**Col. 3:16**) and the giving of offerings for the poor and the ministry (**Acts 4:32-37; 2 Cor. 9:6-15.**) There were also four specific purposes highlighted in **Acts 2:42** for church worship. We read, "*And they were continually devoting themselves to the apostle's teaching, and to fellowship, to the breaking of bread, and to prayer.*"

The "apostle's teaching" refers to the Hebrew Bible (our Old Testament), Jesus' teachings, and the teachings of the apostles in light of both the Old Testament and Jesus' teachings. In short, it is a reference to God's Word, the Bible. "Fellowship" refers to coming together as believers. We need each other. We are to come together for the purpose for worshipping God and for supporting each other in our Christian walks. **Hebrews 10:24** warns us *not to forsake the assembling together of one another, as is the habit of some.*

"Breaking of the bread" refers to the Lord's Supper. In **Lk. 22:19-20**, we read, "*And when He had taken some bread and given thanks, He broke it and gave it to them, saying, "This is My body which is given for you; do this in remembrance of Me." And in the same way He took the cup after they had eaten, saying, "This cup which is poured out for you is the new covenant in My blood."*

I find it significant that the remembrance of Jesus is around a table. It speaks to us of that reality of fellowship that we have when we are around the dinner table. I am convinced that God made food not only

for our bodies, to teach us reliance upon Him, but also to bring us together. God is Holy. He is set apart and above all creation. We, on the other hand, are finite, frail and with fault. God seeks to transform our weak sin natures into the image of Christ. But that can't happen unless Jesus died for us. Now as a result of His death, we have fellowship with Him. Do you see the powerful symbolism in this incredible ceremony? It is why we climax our service with the remembrance of His death and the partaking of His body and blood.

But the Lord's table is not only a symbol of communion we have with Him and one another in Christ, it is also a table of sacrifice. Jesus said, "*The New Covenant in my blood.*" The last meal Jesus had with His disciples was a Passover meal. Just as God passed over the homes of the Israelites in Egypt and spared them from His judgment as a result of the blood of sacrificed lambs sprinkled over the door posts and mantels, so too Jesus' death is God's means of mercy and deliverance for our sins. His blood covers us.

Finally, the fourth element of worship is "prayer," which refers to lifting up our requests and thanksgivings to the Lord as a church family. We are to pray without ceasing (**I Thess. 5:17**). We aren't to be anxious, but by prayer and supplication we are to make known our requests to God (**Phip. 4:4-7**). Prayer is communication with our Father in heaven and it is the lifeblood of our service.

### **CATHOLIC ORDER OF SERVICE**

Clearly, the beauty of Catholic Worship is that we have all the above elements present in the context of the service. If you turn in your prayer books notice that our service is broken into two parts. The first is called the "Ministry of the Word;" the second, "Holy Communion." During the Ministry of the Word we hear the written Word of God (ie. the lessons) read, the Word of God preached (the sermon), we stand and declare what we believe (the Creed), we lift up prayers in the Prayers of the People, and we confess our sins. This prepares us for the reception of Holy Communion where we celebrate the Lord's death, His resurrection and the fact He is returning. In other words, we celebrate the sacrifice of God's own Son for the sins of the world, for the means of grace and the hope of glory. We remember that we can now have a personal relationship with Jesus Christ and eternal life and that we have been given the means (the Holy Spirit) to become like Him. We also are celebrating that we have an eternal relationship with one another. And we do so by coming forward publicly before the Lord's altar; all this in the context of one service; hence, "the Liturgy."

And it is called, "the liturgy," for a reason. If it is truly going to be glorifying to the Lord, then we need to be active participants in body, mind and spirit. So I challenge you to refocus, to not simply go through the motions, but rather to get spiritually ready for the worship of the Lord, to kneel, stand, sing, speak, and lift up holy hands to our King. It is why we gather today. In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, AMEN!