

Teaching the Liturgy of Everyday Life

(Deanery Clericus, January 21, 2020)

In this new church year, God has been encouraging me to “change my mind,” and I have been encouraging our people to change *their* minds – about the Seasons of the Liturgy. So I thought that, today, I would share with you a bit of what we’ve been exploring together on the liturgical seasons.

It’s true — they are different seasons in the Church Calendar, which we mark with special colours. It’s true — they are the seasons of the Life of Christ, and grounded in both scripture & tradition. But they are **also** the seasons of *our own lives*. The seasons of our life *“in Christ.”*

The question behind all of this is “What does it really mean to follow Jesus?” (... if not to follow the seasons of his life?) Not simply to follow them formally, liturgically, but to discern the “holy moments” of these sacred Seasons in each day of our lives, and, by grace, to respond to them well.

Because practically — *for us* — the seasons are really **not** big blocks of calendar time — *but rather, a series of different spiritual “moments” that we pass through in everyday life. Moments of Grace, which don’t follow any calendar, but can arise in any month, on any day, many times a day.*

And yet, these moments of grace do follow a particular, dynamic cycle. For example, we don’t just have *Epiphany* moments “out of the blue;” they only arise out of our prior *Christmas & Advent* moments. Much like 3-year olds only emerge out of 2-year olds; and 2-year olds only emerge out of 1-year olds. That’s just how it works. There’s no way to somehow “bypass” the developmental cycle. It’s “built-in,” by virtue of creation. In the same way, the dynamics of our development in Christ inevitably follow the cycle of the life of Jesus. It’s “built-in” – by virtue of both our creation in the Image of God, and of the Incarnation of Christ in the humanity of Jesus.

Our “Advent moments” are those self-revealing moments of grace when the hopeful Light of God’s wise, just, and loving presence shines in upon the dark & disturbing areas within us (*our unhealthy attitudes & beliefs; our demoralizing emotions & memories; our harmful actions*) become apparent to us as true causes of trouble & suffering (*both in our own lives, and in the lives of those affected by us.*) In our Advent moments, The Light of Christ shines in and offers to correct us, repair us, and heal us in these wounded & wounding areas. The Light may come through another person, through the Scriptures, through a Sacrament — but mysteriously, at the same time — it comes straight into our conscious awareness from the Mind of God.

And when (*in the Light of these Advent moments of grace*) we accept that we need help... that, on our own, we cannot correct the false, repair the broken, or heal the wounded areas of our lives — when we accept our need for God’s forgiving & transforming love, and allow ourselves to be embraced — to surrender ourselves to God’s Care — something miraculous happens. We are ushered by the Spirit of Christ into a “Christmas moment.”

In our Christmas moments, the Grace of God in Christ, through the power of the Holy Spirit, lovingly forgives, corrects, repairs, and heals us in these wounded & wounding areas of our lives. *“The Word becomes flesh”* — this time, not within **Jesus** — but within **us**. Within our attitudes & thoughts & beliefs; our emotions & memories & points of view. Our hearts & minds are gracefully reorganized with Christ at their centre — and suddenly — life no longer looks the same as it did a moment ago. In these moments, we are inwardly converted, inwardly “born again” (*& again... & again...*) And, thankfully, these Christmas moments don’t only come in December, or only once in a lifetime.

Our Epiphany moments are those Moments of Grace when we are "outwardly" converted, through *co* ... *operating* with God's saving process in the details of our inner & outer lives. In our moments of Epiphany, our newly converted hearts and points of view are *made manifest* in our words and deeds — and joyfully *recognized* as good — by God, and by those around us who have "eyes to see" and "ears to hear." We all need to be recognized for the good that is in us, and for the good that we are doing.

Our Epiphany moments inspire us to "draw" even more deeply on the goodness of God. Inspire us to "co" ... "operate" with the Spirit of Christ — in becoming good and doing good — even more consciously & actively than we have in the past.

It's through the Light of our Epiphany moments that the Spirit draws others to Christ (for nothing is more attractive than genuine goodness.) Genuine goodness in our words and deeds is most persuasive, and very "cleanly" persuasive. It strike a chord with the other's *own* human needs and orients them to hear Christ inwardly calling *them* — to "Come & See" first-hand how he speaks and relates to them.

We are facing many complex challenges in "*handing down the faith*" to our children (who might become the next generation of the church); and in "*sharing the faith*" with outsiders (who might *also* become the next generation.) But perhaps "the Epiphany challenge" is (*as it always has been*) the greatest challenge that we face in growing the church. For these purely attractive & persuasive moments of Epiphany — when the Living Christ actually manifests in our words & deeds — only arise in our lives when we are responding well to our prior "self-renewing "Christmas moments" — and to our prior self-revealing "Advent moments." Only then are we in a position to consciously, actively engage in the "working out of our own salvation" (well enough & frequently enough) so that the actual goodness of God.. the actual *love* of God... shines forth in our communications. To put this "Epiphany challenge" back in terms of the child development analogy: how can we possibly be 3-year-olds, if we haven't yet been 2-year-olds, and 1-year olds? How can we speak & act in life-changing ways through yet unconverted regions of our hearts & minds? This suggests, I think, that growing the church is not simply a strategic problem. It certainly is that. But it's also a foundational problem that is always present in the church, for these grace-filled moments of Advent, Christmas, and Epiphany are always and only "live," "personal," and "fresh" — never lifeless, second-hand, or stale.

Teaching the liturgical seasons in this way — as a continual stream of holy moments arising in our everyday lives that require our personal, first-hand response — can be a helpful way of tending to the spiritual, foundational dimension of our challenges in the church. It can become a practical framework and program for living each day "in the moment," as we like to say. It can become the practical "liturgy of everyday life" that parishioners are "sent forth" into at the dismissal. And instead of having 12-steps, it only has 5 (Advent, Christmas, Epiphany, Lent & Easter)! And it's free (*not easy*, but free). More importantly, it's not "original." It has long, deep, reliable roots in sacred scripture and tradition.

Epiphany is the point I've taken this to thus far in the parish. Lent & Easter will complete the cycle and help us to discern the Cross and the Resurrection at work "behind the scenes" within all of our moments of grace. So far, the response has been good (but only in the usual sense of "good sermon, Shaun" at the end of the service.) It's a bit radical for us, I think. I'm sure it will take time, and repetition, and informal pastoral application when problems arise, to see if it actually bears good fruit in our thoughts, words, and deeds. And, as usual, the hardest part is credibility — the inner & outer work of my own perceiving & responding well to the moments of grace in my everyday life.

Thanks for listening. And let me know your thoughts!