

# Spiritual Fertility

Lent III, March 24, 2019

Last Sunday I spoke to you about our need for **inner stillness** if we are to more fully experience the transforming power of The Liturgy in our lives. And I thought that, this morning, it might be helpful to clarify what I mean when I say "**The Liturgy**."

When Anglicans speak of "**The Liturgy**," we mean something very specific. We mean the ancient Eucharist-centered liturgy that was handed down by the apostles. And so, technically, for us, "The Liturgy" means everything that happens between **The Apostolic Greeting** -- which says, "*The grace of Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all*" -- and **The Dismissal** -- which says, "*Go in peace to love and serve the Lord*" (or some variation of that, depending on pastoral need.)

So when we speak of **The Liturgy**, we are not referring to Morning Prayer, or Evening Prayer, for example. These are indeed **liturgies** -- beautiful ones at that -- but they are not what we mean when we say, **THE** Liturgy. And this is the case whether we are using the Old English Rite of the "red book," (the BCP), or the Contemporary Rite of the "green book," (the BAS).

One implication of this is that when Anglicans speak of "The Liturgy," we are referring to **essentially the same thing** that Roman Catholic churches call "The Mass" and that Eastern Orthodox churches call "The Divine Liturgy." All three of these churches -- the Anglican, the Eastern Orthodox, and the Roman Catholic -- are self-defined as "catholic" churches (catholic-with-a-small-"c"), which doesn't mean that they are all **Roman** catholic. In practical terms, it means that all three of these churches -- the 3 largest churches in the world -- follow the ancient Eucharist-centered liturgy that was handed down by the apostles, **a liturgy that is essentially the re-enactment of a sacred drama.**

Another implication of this, *which may leave you with many questions*, is that we are not a **Protestant** church. Protestant churches, by definition, do not follow the ancient Eucharist-centered liturgy that was handed down by the apostles. Or, to put it more accurately, Protestant churches **disagree** with "small-c-catholics" about what exactly that ancient liturgy of the apostles actually was. (*There is a notable exception to this, though -- some parts of the Lutheran Church around the world have discerned that, despite their founder, Martin Luther's reputation as being "the first Protestant," their basic Lutheran liturgy is essentially catholic-with-a-small-"c".*) Protestant liturgies can vary widely from one denomination to the next. And even within individual Protestant churches, the **basic liturgy** may well vary from one Sunday to the next.

In contrast, you can walk into an Anglican church, or an Eastern Orthodox church, or a Roman Catholic church -- anywhere in the world -- and you will encounter the same essential liturgy being practiced. We all have this carefully worded core liturgy -- that we believe is divinely inspired -- and that we follow, word for word, each Lord's Day, when we gather together. We all see it as "our highest form of prayer." We all follow this same basic approach.

Now where did this ancient approach of ours come from? Any ideas?

It came from the apostles, yes. But where did they get it from? They got it from Jesus, yes. But where did Jesus get it from? He got it from God, yes. But, more specifically, he got it from God's way of working with the Jews. The deepest roots of what we Anglicans call "The Liturgy," and the Roman Catholics call "The Mass," and the Eastern Orthodox call "The Divine Liturgy" -- are in the ancient Jewish way of worship. **Like the Jews, the heart of our worship is the enactment of a sacred drama, which follows a sacred script.**

We can be proud -- rightly proud -- that this is our spiritual heritage. History confirms that this approach is an extremely powerful way of being transformed, day by day, into the image of our loving God. We don't need to apologize for what we do here on Sundays.

**But...** we do need to recognize that there are also "**downsides**" to this approach that we take. Perhaps the biggest downside is that it is actually a very *demanding* approach, even though following a sacred script seems quite easy on the surface. Because not only does The Liturgy require some careful **training** on its meaning & purpose in our lives, it actually remains fairly "inaccessible" without some degree of **inner stillness** in us. And, as we know, that is a tall order in a society which works night & day to increase & manipulate the "**inner static**" in our lives, so that we will follow its conventions and buy its products without question.

To consciously, actively participate in The Liturgy is not a simple thing. For example, it is not like listening to an inspirational talk at The Optimist Club. ( -- *Not that there's anything wrong with listening to an inspirational talk at The Optimist Club. It may be wonderful & very worthwhile* -- ) But **The Liturgy** is something altogether different. In a very real sense, it is something that is **not of this world**. And yet, when we come to "get its drift," and allow it to inwardly influence us, it empowers us to **fully live** in this world, and even to make a real difference in it. Because the **fruit** that it cultivates in us is **the capacity to experience and to share Divine Love**.

Jesus understood all of this at the most profound of levels.

When he told the parable about the man who had a fig tree planted in his vineyard (Luke 13:1-9) ...

- The "**man**" represents God -- the One whom Jesus called "Father."
- The "**fig tree**" represents the Jewish people, and, by extension, all of humanity.
- The "**vineyard**" in which the fig tree was planted, represents the sacred liturgy of the Jews.
- The **problem** in the parable -- the fact that the fig trees were not "bearing fruit" -- represents the problem that many of the Jewish believers in that time were not actually receiving the spiritual nourishment that was being infused to them by God through the soil of the sacred liturgy. And thus, they were not outwardly manifesting its life-giving effects.

The "**gardener**" in the parable represents Jesus. And so, the hidden message in the parable is actually a dialogue within the Trinity, a dialogue between God and Jesus in the Spirit.

God says, "*Jesus, my people are not benefiting from being planted in the rich soil of my sacred liturgy. They are not bearing the fruit that it was designed to cultivate in them. They are not developing the capacity to receive and to share Divine Love in their lives. So, what should I do, Jesus? Should I abandon the human experiment?*"

It's a rhetorical question. God has no intention of abandoning the human experiment. That is why God sends Jesus, the gardener, .... to solve the problem that God's people weren't being nourished as they should be by their sacred liturgy.

And so, Jesus tells God "*No -- there's no need to give up on humanity. For them to start benefiting from The Liturgy, all they need is for a little "fertilizer" to be added to the mix.*"

I would suggest to you that the "**fertilizer**" which they so desperately needed, and which we **all** so need... represents a **loving mixture** of (1) the **Teachings** of Christ, and (2) the **Peace** of Christ.

So, in a nutshell... We become **spiritually fertile** by being in the company of Jesus, by being loved by him, by **being deeply soaked** in his Teachings and in his Peace. Then, The Liturgy -- these ancient, sacred words that we repeat every Sunday -- come **alive** for us, **engage** us, give us **pause**, and actually **work** in our lives, strengthening our capacity to experience Divine Love and to share it with others -- which, in the end, is what it is really all about.

**Thanks be to God.**

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