

Liturgy Notes – The Greeting (Salutation)

“Hello”. “How are you going?” “G’day”. These are different ways that we greet each other in daily life. A greeting enables us to recognise and welcome the other person, and to re-establish our common relationship.

The liturgy of the church also provides God’s people with a greeting:

*The Lord be with you: **And also with you.*** However, this “salutation”, as it is known, is more than just an everyday greeting in churchy words. The salutation recognises the fact that God really is with us – it is an expression of the name given to Jesus, “Immanuel”, God with us. This conviction lies behind the many biblical examples of this greeting (Judges 6:12; Luke 1:28; 2 Thessalonians 3:16; 2 Tim 4:22).

So the words, *The Lord be with you: **And also with you,*** are especially appropriate before those key parts of the service where the Lord has promised his presence, such as the reading of the word and the administration of holy communion. Therefore it comes before the Prayer of the Day, which is really the prayer to prepare us for the hearing of God’s word; it opens the liturgy of the Lord’s supper; and it also precedes the post-communion prayer which is leading up to the final blessing, sending us into the world. In summary: before the readings, the supper, and the benediction.

The salutation also recognises the special bond between minister and congregation. It expresses our common faith, our common purpose, and our common desire to assist each other in worship. The pastor is saying, in effect, “May the Lord be with you to help you in your worship”, and the people respond, “And may he be with you as you lead us in worship”. However, the greeting can also form part of the everyday speech of Christians, just as when we say “God bless you”. *The Lord be with you: **And also with you*** is a wonderful way Christians can encourage each other in daily life.

In the older liturgies the people responded with “***And with your Spirit***”. This is an even more fitting response, as it affirms that we are worshiping in the power of the Holy Spirit, the Spirit of God who testifies with our spirit that we are children of God (Rom 8:16). The latest revision of the Roman Mass, as well as the forthcoming Lutheran hymnbook of the LCMS, has reverted to this original translation: *The Lord be with you: **And with your Spirit.***

Liturgy Notes – Introduction

This is the first of a number of bulletin inserts discussing the nature of the church’s liturgy. Each week (or most weeks) I will spend a few moments at the beginning of our service sharing and explaining some aspect of the divine service. May these reflections help us all engage in the liturgy more fruitfully, for the glory of God, for our edification, and for the well-being of the world.

One of the most important ways to understand and appreciate our divine service better is to ask ourselves the very important question: *for whose sake do we worship?* Several answers could be given to this question, some which come more readily to mind than others.

- We worship for our *own* sake – to be forgiven, taught, nourished, and blessed through the means of grace.
- We worship for our *congregation’s* sake – to support our brothers and sisters in Christ in their worship.
- We also worship for the sake of *visitors, inquirers* and those *searching* for faith.
- Importantly, we worship for the sake of the *world* – by our prayer, praise and proclamation we serve the community and world around us in seen and unseen ways.
- Ultimately, we worship for *God’s* sake – to give him the glory he is worthy of, to “keep his name holy”, and to “sanctify the Sabbath”.

All these aspects are part of the “why” of worship. You can see then that the “agenda” of worship is very broad, since we worship not only for our own sake, but for our fellow believers, for the community and world, and for the sake of God’s honour and glory.

Question: *For whose sake are you worshiping today?*

Liturgy Notes – Worship as Public Service

Being a “public servant” is perhaps not the most fulfilling and exciting job in the world, but it is nevertheless a very important and necessary part of our society’s functioning. Without a public service, many things we take for granted (eg Medicare refunds) simply would not happen.

To some the liturgy is even duller than the public service - but it is infinitely more important! The original meaning of the word “liturgy” (from the Greek *leitourgia*) means a “public service”. Liturgy was any public work by concerned citizens on behalf of society, and for the wellbeing of society. And that meaning has always been behind for our church’s “liturgy” as well. When we worship, we are serving the wellbeing of the world – even though many take that for granted. But as a father of the ancient church put it: “The world is ruled by the prayers of the saints”.

The New Testament describes many things as liturgy, even if the word itself is often lost in translation. Leadership in Christian worship (Acts 13:2), proclamation of the gospel (Rom 15:16), and charitable giving (2 Cor 9:12) are all described as *leitourgia*. So is the ministry of angels on our behalf (Heb 1:14), and most important of all, Jesus’ continual prayer for his church from the heavenly sanctuary (Heb 8:2,6), is described as liturgy.

Today, as we pray, praise and offer ourselves to God, we also will be serving the common good. Our liturgy is an act of public service for the wellbeing of the world. That is most obvious in the Prayer of the Church, but it happens in other ways too, as future Liturgy Notes will explore.

Challenge: *Think of yourself as a public servant for the next hour!*

Liturgy Notes – This is the Feast of Victory

The various forms of Holy Communion liturgy we are familiar with usually place a hymn of praise immediately after the *Lord, have mercy*. While traditionally this has been the *Glory to God in the highest*, “*The Service – Alternative Form*” uses *This is the Feast of Victory*.

Even without the accompanying music, one can hardly miss the note of triumphant joy resounding through this hymn. It lavishes upon our Lord the fullest possible honours: power, riches, wisdom, glory and blessing. The words are based on several key passages in the book of Revelation (5:9-13 and 19:4-9). This writing describes how through the death and resurrection of Christ all the arrogant and ungodly powers of the world will finally be defeated, and are in fact already doomed. This is what we celebrate in this hymn. And what is more, the church through its worship brings this victory into the world. By singing such things, the church dethrones the idols of this world and announces to the rulers of this world that their power is fading.

A few key phrases are worth noting.

- The *feast* of which we sing pictures the final happiness of God’s people in the age to come, a happiness that is often described as a feast. In the meantime, our humble feast around the altar anticipates this glorious celebration.
- Although we sing of Christ’s triumph, we are reminded that his victory came about through suffering and the cross: the victorious one is the *Lamb who was slain*. We too only know victory under the shadow of the cross.
- Nevertheless, this blood is powerful enough to *set us free to be people of God*. In singing of such freedom, we will always bring to God the oppressed of the world, and pray that they too may experience an exodus from their personal slavery.
- Indeed, we don’t just sing among ourselves, but we *sing with all the people of God, and join in the hymn of all creation*. Past and future generations, angels and archangels, mountains and seas, animals and trees, sun and moon and stars, are all called to bless the Lord and rejoice in his defeat of decay and evil. Alleluia!

Challenge: *Sing this hymn as a challenge to all the powers and rulers of the world!*

Liturgy Notes – Holy Communion as Praise

In the last Liturgy Notes we observed that the service with Holy Communion is the normal service of the church, and not the exception. Today we reflect on the liturgy that surrounds the sacrament.

If you were invited out for a meal, it would be strange if when you got there you were quickly ushered to the table, given a very brief description of the food, and once you had eaten it, were dismissed with no further ado. Although the food might be very good, something would be missing from what we consider a meal: namely, conversation, company, complimenting the cook, sharing our stories and connecting with the lives of others.

It's the same with our Lord's meal. While the mere Words of Institution and the reception of Christ's body and blood are central, and always effective, they are not the only things that constitute Holy Communion. In our liturgical tradition, shared with many other churches, the celebration of the sacrament begins with the *Preface*, includes the *Sanctus* (Holy, Holy), the *Eucharistic* (thanksgiving) *Prayer*, the *Lord's Prayer*, the *Lamb of God*, and concludes with some form of *Post-Communion Thanksgiving* and prayer. All these together make up the church's table conversation around our Lord's meal. Like any good table conversation, the communion liturgy ranges from one thing to another: it calls us to remember the Lord's salvation, it involves extensive thanksgiving for God's creation and salvation, it connects us with Christians of all ages, (and with the angels and all creation), and it anticipates our Lord's return to share with us the eternal feast of heaven. *Amen, come, Lord Jesus!*

So the Holy Communion liturgy is not just extra baggage encumbering a simple celebration, but is actually vital to that celebration. It enables the church to receive our Lord's life giving sacrament; it also helps the whole church offer its spiritual sacrifice of thanksgiving and praise to God.

Reflection: *In the words of the Communion liturgy, take note of who is included in this celebration.*

Liturgy Notes – The Priesthood of Believers

We have noted previously that we worship for the sake of the world. Among other things, our liturgy is "public service" for the well-being of our society. This important public duty is what "the priesthood of believers" is all about.

In the Old Testament the role of the priest was to stand between God and the Israelites. They would bring God's grace and his word to the people. They would also bring the people's prayers and sacrifices to God. They were mediators, go betweens. But now the former priesthood has been set aside because Jesus has become our perfect high priest. He is the one who eternally mediates between us and God. That means the church has no need for an earthly priesthood – Jesus is all we need.

But the unbelieving world still needs a priesthood! And that's our role as the "priesthood of believers". The priesthood of believers is what happens when the church shares in Christ's priestly ministry for the sake of the world. On the one hand, we represent the world and all its needs to God. On the other hand, we bring God and his grace to the world. We are mediators, go betweens. The priesthood of believers describes not so much what happens within the church, among ourselves, but how we as a body relate to the world. We are not the church's priesthood, but the world's priesthood.

The bible describes our priestly work in many ways, often in terms of "offering", which was the main task of the priesthood. We offer our bodies to God for holy service in the world (Romans 6:13; 12:1). We offer praise to God on behalf of all people (Hebrews 13:15; 1 Peter 2:9). We proclaim God's grace to all people (Romans 15:16; 1 Peter 2:9). We offer our prayers for the needs of all people (Revelation 5:8; 8:4). We offer our money and material goods to help others (Philippians 4:18; Hebrews 13:16). This priestly work begins in our worship, and flows out into the world as we go our way.

1 Peter 2:9 describes this awesome privilege: *But you are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people belonging to God, that you may declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light.*

Question: *For whom will you use your priesthood this week?*

Liturgy Notes – Lord, have mercy!

After Martin Luther had just died, a piece of paper was found in his pocket. On it were scribbled the words, “We are beggars, that’s the truth”. The fact that we are utter beggars before God is expressed in our liturgy every week with the words, “*Lord, have mercy. Christ, have mercy. Lord, have mercy*”. This is nothing else but a beggars cry for mercy, help, assistance, pity and charity.

The words recall many of the New Testament accounts of people crying to Jesus for mercy, either for themselves or for others. For example, we think of the Canaanite woman whose daughter suffered from demon possession (Matt 15:22), the ten lepers (Luke 17:13), or the two blind men (Matt 9:27). In every case, these desperate people appealed to Jesus for help by crying out, “Lord, have mercy!”

In the same way, the “*Lord, have mercy*” in our liturgy is a wide ranging prayer for mercy and help in any possible situation or need. In these words we are holding out our begging bowls before God – and not only for ourselves, but also for the needs of others and the world. While in times past it has been regarded as a prayer for forgiveness, that is not really its function here. After all, we have only just confessed our sins and received forgiveness in the absolution! Rather, we are exercising our role as the priesthood of believers, representing the world in all its poverty to God; in praying “*Lord, have mercy*” we are acting as public servants for all who are deprived in any way – materially, socially or spiritually.

For this reason it is repeated several times, so that we can place our needs within it, and so that it’s not over before we even begin. The pastor may hold his arms out with hands upturned, visibly depicting our beggar status. In the *Alternative Form*, the “*Lord, have mercy*” is accompanied by actual petitions, as we shall note at another time.

Question: Who do you know that needs God’s mercy today?

Liturgy Notes – Frequent Holy Communion

It was the practice of Australian Lutheranism in earlier years to celebrate Holy Communion on a very infrequent basis. In recent decades, however, this has changed, so that many Lutheran congregations now celebrate the sacrament more often than not - if not every week. But despite this positive development, many Lutherans still question the reasons behind more frequent communion.

The simple answer is that a communion service is normal Christian worship. Holy Communion is not an “add on”. To omit the celebration of the sacrament is permitted, and may even be wise at times, but it is still the exception. The history of the church from its birth bears this out: from the original Lord’s Supper to the “breaking of bread” in the New Testament, from the early church to the period of the Reformation, and from then on, the Mass, or Divine Service, or Service of Word and Sacrament, constitutes the normal worship of the Church on the Lord’s Day. Non-communion services, such as Matins and Vespers, catechism and preaching services, were held in addition to the Divine Service, but did not replace it. But where non-communion does become the norm, this is usually due to influences and ideas that have no real part in Lutheran theology and worship.

This does not necessarily mean that everyone must receive the sacrament each Sunday, or that in the past they did. Communion attendance has in fact been low during many periods of history. The point, however, is that the Church *offers* Holy Communion every week. The Augsburg Confession notes that: “*one common Mass is observed among us on every holy day; and on other days, if any desire the sacrament, it is also administered to those who ask for it*” (XXIV.34). And as we will explore next time, even if only a few people attend the table itself, the *liturgy* of the sacrament constitutes the Church’s great sacrifice of praise and thanksgiving: “*Let us give thanks to the Lord: it is right to give him thanks and praise*”.

Nevertheless, it is the Lord himself who provides the greatest motivation: his invitation to sinners, his giving of himself, his gracious command to “*Do this in remembrance of me*” – all these are enough to draw us to his table regularly.

Question: Does infrequent communing increase our love for Christ?

Liturgy Notes – Nicene Creed

“Who do you say I am?” Jesus put this question to his disciples, and today he addresses it to us and his Church as well. Peter answered with the brief confession: *“You are the Christ, the Son of the living God”*, and over the years this central statement of faith has grown into the Apostles and Nicene Creed.

The word “Creed” is Latin for “Credo”, meaning “I believe”. It is a statement of both personal and corporate faith. Three main factors lie behind the emergence of the Creeds: the need for an orthodox statement of faith to challenge the threat of heresy (false teaching); the need to teach converts and prepare for them for baptism, Holy Communion and life in the Church; and the need to witness before the world what the Church actually believes.

The Nicene Creed in particular is the result of a controversy that troubled the Church for most of the fourth century. In response to the teaching of Arius, who denied that Jesus is truly God, the Nicene Creed categorically affirms the truth that Jesus Christ is “God from God, Light from Light, true God from true God” and “of one being with the Father”. Connected with this central truth, the Nicene Creed also confesses the triune nature of God: he is one God in three persons, Father, Son and Holy Spirit. The word “Nicene” is taken from the ancient city of Nicea, where in 325 AD an early form of this Creed was adopted. From the 11th century onwards the Nicene Creed became a regular feature of the Catholic Mass.

The Nicene Creed is not the property of any denomination, but belongs to the whole Church. Changes in translation and wording are usually worked out ecumenically. In the face of many conflicting and dubious views of who Jesus is, the Nicene Creed continues to proclaim that he is *“the Christ, the Son of the living God”*.

Question: Why is Pontius Pilate specifically named?

Liturgy Notes – Lord, have mercy! (part 2)

We have previously noted that the *“Lord, have mercy”* is essentially a beggar’s cry for mercy and help of any kind. It is not only a prayer for forgiveness, but a prayer covering any conceivable need. Nor is it prayed only for ourselves, but for the whole world.

This wider scope of the *“Lord, have mercy”* becomes apparent in *“The Service – Alternative Form”*. There the *“Lord, have mercy”* accompanies a number of specific requests: for our peace and salvation, for the world, for the church, and for those presently worshipping. They anticipate the fuller Prayer of the Church later in the service.

A dominant thought in these petitions is the request for peace.

- The first petition reads: *“In peace let us pray to the Lord”*, reminding us that before we engage in our public service of prayer for the world we first must be at peace amongst ourselves (1 Tim 2:8; Mt 5:23-24).
- The petition *“for the peace from above”* shows us that the peace we seek is first and foremost a gift of God: it is the peace proclaimed by the angels at Jesus’ birth (Lk 2:14); it is the peace the risen Jesus breathed on his apostles enabling them to forgive sins in his name (Jn 20:19-21); ultimately this peace from above stems from our being justified through faith in Christ (Rom 5:1).
- And in keeping with our role as the priesthood of believers, we bring the needs of the whole world to God when we pray *“for the peace of the whole world, for the wellbeing of the church of God, and for the unity of all”*. In this we always remember Jesus’ words in John 14:27: *“Peace I leave with you; my peace I give you. I do not give as the world gives. Do not let your hearts be troubled and do not be afraid”*. How the world needs this peace! Lord, have mercy!

Question: What situation will you bring to the *“Lord, have mercy”*?

Liturgy Notes – Glory to God in the Highest

Gloria in Excelsis is the traditional Latin title of this very ancient hymn which originated in the Greek speaking church of the 3rd or 4th century. If the *Lord, have mercy* is our cry as beggars before God, the *Gloria in Excelsis* lifts us up to heaven. In its very first lines we join with the angels by singing with them the song they sung at the birth of Christ: “Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, among those with whom he is pleased”.

The rest of the *Gloria in Excelsis* amplifies this praise of God’s glory. First, God the Father is praised, thanked and blessed because of his great glory. God is adored simply because of his being glorious. Quite apart from his saving work, that is enough reason to praise him! But we also do remember his saving work, as next, Christ the Son is worshipped for taking the sins of the world away and now praying for us at God’s right hand. And then, after a final acknowledgement of the Holy Spirit, the hymn concludes where it started: with “the glory of God the Father”.

A few other observations:

- The Trinitarian structure of the *Gloria in Excelsis* recalls the Apostles Creed. This reminds us that praise of God is more than just our personal expression of worship – but is always a *confession* of true faith. This hymn is therefore like a mini-creed in itself.
- The glory, height and holiness of God expressed here remind us of a similar hymn later in the service: the *Sanctus*. They are like sister hymns, a hymn of glory for the two main parts of the service.
- You may notice a slight “dip” in the middle of the *Gloria in Excelsis*, where we briefly pray for mercy, before ascending again to the praise of God’s glory. This expresses well the two poles of our life before God: we cry as beggars, yet we sing with the angels.
- Since the *Gloria in Excelsis* has always had a celebratory tone, the practice has been to refrain from singing it in more penitential seasons, like Advent and Lent.

Reflection: Do we glorify God simply for his glory?

Liturgy Notes – Matins

The order of Matins is obviously quite different from any kind of Holy Communion service. That’s because Matins, like its evening counterpart Vespers, originated as a daily order of praise and prayer, not as the main Sunday service. Matins, or “Morning Prayer”, was prayed every day, and still is in some churches and communities. However, in our tradition, Matins has a history of being used as a non-communion service for Sundays, and as a result has been “filled out” with the full compliment of Sunday readings, extra hymns, the Creed and the sermon.

If we put these extra (though important) parts aside for a moment, the structure of Matins becomes clearer, consisting of four main components: Psalms, readings, canticle, and prayers.

- The **psalms** are the chief prayer-book and hymnal of the Church. They are God’s word to us, yet also very human prayers which express the full range of emotions and experiences had by God’s people. Most importantly, they are fulfilled in Christ (Luke 24:44) and prayed by Christ. As our leader in prayer and praise, Jesus is the either the subject, or the goal, or the speaker of the psalms (eg Hebrews 2:12 & Psalm 22:22). Our Matins service uses just two psalms: Psalm 95 (*O come, let us sing to the Lord*), and the psalm of the day.
- The **readings** continue the regular pattern of Old Testament, Epistle and Gospel. As well as instructing and sanctifying us for life, the readings also guide our prayers and praises within the service itself.
- The **Canticle** is a song drawn directly from Scripture. We generally use the *Song of Zechariah* (Luke 1:68-79), but other canticles can be used too, such as the *Te Deum*, and many others.
- The **prayers** comprise the *Lord, Have Mercy*, the *Lord’s Prayer*, some intercessions, and the classic *Prayer for Grace*. Other forms of prayer, such as a litany or responsive prayer, can be used instead.

While Matins is less sacramental than the Holy Communion service, focusing rather on our “sacrifice of praise”, it is nevertheless our Lord Jesus who leads us in our prayer, praise and thanksgiving to God the Father.

Question: Why is the Apostles Creed placed among the prayers??