

# The Western Rite: Its Development and Rich History and Its Relevance for Our Worship Life Today

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## Introduction

Permit me to begin this presentation with a *caveat*. When I was asked to make this presentation, I protested that I was no expert nor have I ever been accused of being an expert on our liturgical heritage in the Western Rite; there are many in our circles who could deal with this topic far more competently than I. Additionally I protested that I really would not have time to prepare a scholarly tome that might do justice to the subject or match the competence of others who have worked on this subject much more than I have. In spite of my reservations, you have nevertheless asked me to make this presentation. Kindly remember my admitted lack of expertise; you will see shortly that I have been faithful to my assurance that I would not give you a scholarly tome.

What then do I propose to present? Simply this: A little background that may be familiar to most or all of you, and then a walk through the Common Liturgy, the Ordinary of the Western Rite, that reflects my own love affair with it and the other major liturgies bequeathed to us by our fathers in Matins and Vespers, Prime and Compline. That love affair stretches back over 50 years. The meat and potatoes of the Liturgy have been my joy in good days and a refreshing river of water from the gospel in many a dark and anguish filled night of the soul.

To those who may think that they have come up with something better than the Western Rite in these last days, I would say only this: I have not the least desire to quarrel with you; I am merely responding to your conference request for this presentation. Secondly I would urge you to adopt an attitude of proper humility before you go charging into the treasure house passed down to us by almost 2,000 years of saints and martyrs, teachers and confessors, pastors and the faithful. They, to be sure, would never contend that what they have given us is all there is to offer in liturgical worship. The Liturgy, after all, is itself the product many generations of worship and reflects in its evolution changes in conditions in the church from one generation to another. The generations of fathers who kept this and left that would insist with, for example, Art. XV and XXIV of the Augsburg Confession and of the Apology, and X of the Formula of Concord, that ceremonies are *adiaphora*. They would remind us that liturgies and ceremonies are a means to an end, not an end in themselves. Let those who can attain the proper end of ceremonies, i.e., the glorification of Christ, the teaching of pure doctrine, and the warning and the consolation of fallen man, in a better way than our historic liturgies do, let them, I say, have at it. Just beware of assuming that you are wiser and more holy than all of the fathers when you do it. And remember that their bequest to us comes not from one or two who imposed the Western Rite on us; it comes from the approbation and the consensus, from, if you will, the mind of the church over these many generations. It deserves our reverent and respectful consideration. And while making sure that anything put in its place will glorify Christ, teach pure doctrine, afflict the comfortable and console the afflicted, let those casting aside the ancient liturgies keep in mind the counsel of the Confessions:

*... we teach that liberty in these matters should be exercised moderately, so that the inexperienced may not take offense and, on account of an abuse of liberty, become more hostile to the true teaching of the gospel. Nothing in the customary rites may be changed without good reason. Instead, in order to foster harmony, those ancient customs should be observed that can be observed without sin or without proving to be a great burden (AAC. Art. XV, par. 51 [Kolb edition, p. 230]).*

## Preliminaries

To a considerable extent an appreciation for the way we worship depends on the attitude that we bring to what is about to happen in the worship service. The entirety of the Liturgy - - and we should be aware of it before and as we celebrate it - - offers us and our people a stunning reality check. It bids us keep clear in our minds the sharp distinction between what seems to be and what really is in God, in us, in our worship itself. My own prayer before entering the chancel was that famous entry prayer from Psalm 43 with my own little addition: *Enim ago ad alteram Dei; ergo miserere mihi!* Jacob expressed it best when he declared after his encounter with Christ, *Surely the LORD is in this place, and I was not aware of it. ... How awesome is this place! This is none other than the house of God; this is the gate of heaven* (Gen. 28:16-17)! It matters not whether the service is conducted in a barn or a cathedral, in a desert place or on the Mount of the Lord: We are about to enter into the presence of the living God. *Wir besuchen den Gottesdienst!* At his invitation we have come to visit him. We have been invited to be his guests in his house. He has hidden himself there in the shrine of the gospel, and he at the same time reveals himself through it and has promised to reveal himself in no other way<sup>1</sup>. He who made all things out of nothing, he whom the heaven of heavens cannot contain will break the fundamental rule of nature and physics, *Finitum non capax infiniti*. He, the ineffable and incomprehensible, will give himself to us in the water of baptism, in the liturgy of the Word, in the presentation of himself in bread and wine.

And what are you, O sinful man, that you should come into his presence? At Sinai God covered himself with clouds and proclaimed the Law with thunder and lightening and a mountain shaking. At the dedication of the Tabernacle and of Solomon's Temple, God came down in a cloud and veiled his glory, lest mortal man see him and die. In all the worship of the Old Testament only the High Priest could approach him and then only on the Great Day of Atonement and only with blood in his hands. But you draw near to him, speak to him and for him; you present him to his people and his people to him. At least your knees should shake a little! No one is worthy of so exalted an office. But he has entrusted it to you in the holy hour which is about to begin. The lowliness of your person, the lowliness of the place, the lowliness of those coming to visit him and to hear him should not obscure from the eyes of your soul the great glory of the moment.

It seems to me that even Lutheran art and architecture are uniquely suited to this attitude as we begin our celebration of the Liturgy. How different Lutheran churches are from most others. For all the beauty of the great cathedrals in Europe, what stands out in so many of them? Distractions! To be sure there is a beautiful high altar with its tabernacle, its crucifix, its statue of Christ. But all around is art and artifice that turns the eye and the soul away from him, whether it is beautiful painting or the statues of the saints and their altars. Often the altars dedicated to the Mother of God are more decorated and have more candles than his altar does, and they certainly have more visitors than his does. Nor is Roman worship lacking in ways to remove Christ from the center, even though so much of it is the historic Western Rite that we use. The priest is really the center, though of course that would be stoutly denied. He will offer sacrifice and that by virtue of the power passed on to him from Peter's successor and his minions: All depends on him and on them if the sacrifice is to be a valid and efficacious one.

Or on the other hand, consider the sanctuaries of the sectarians. They are so barren in their appearance that the focus of attention is bound to be on the person sitting up front. There simply is nothing else to look at. And their worship so often reflects just that focus: The preacher is the star of the show, whose personality and flash are what have drawn many to the "service" in the first place. But enter a Lutheran church, and what do you see right from the start? The font where our sins are washed away, the cross or crucifix or statue of Christ from whom comes all the blessings that God has to give, the altar of the Sacrament where he feeds us with the very price of our salvation, the pulpit-shrine of his gospel where he meets us through the Word presented by his ambassador. The focus is at once on him who has invited us into his presence and who deigns to come and meet with us there, yes, who comes to give himself to us there.

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<sup>1</sup> That is a point that the Confessions make repeatedly. Cf. especially AAC IV [Kolb, 161], XV, par. 17 [Kolb 225], SA 8 [Kolb 323].

Again, proper worship, proper celebration of the Liturgy begins with an attitude adjustment in the pastor, a marking of the difference in his own mind between the apparent and the real. In point of fact much of what he will do in the coming hour has been designed to accomplish just such an attitude adjustment in those who have come to visit God, to get them also to distinguish between the apparent and the real. What is apparent is weakness, meekness and lowliness in God as he appears in the Liturgy, so that we do not perish at his appearing. What is apparent is weakness, meekness and lowliness in his pastor, so that no one need fear drawing near. What is apparent is weakness, meekness and lowliness in those who have come to visit God in his house; they are a people filled with sin and need, and are so weak and lowly that they often are not even aware of their need or the depth of it at the beginning of the service. But the reality is vastly different. Here is the God who created heaven and earth out of nothing so that he could give it to us for our use; here is the Savior who became man and suffered hell in our place and rose again just for us; here and the Spirit who has come, as St. Bernard says, to kiss the soul in each portrayal of Christ and in the Word of God from the lips of his pastor. Here is the realization of the holy office of the ministry, the embodiment of the ministry of the keys to heaven. Here are the elect people God, chosen in eternity to be saints and heirs of eternal life.

**And so we begin:**

*In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.*

Right from the first word of the Liturgy it's clear: This isn't about the pastor. It isn't even about the attending crowd. It's all about God, the one, true, only and Triune God. It is his name that stands over his house and all that is done there. He is the host. We are his guests. Historically there is disagreement over whether the Invocation is a prayer or a proclamation. It's really both. In the mouth of the pastor God greets us with the proclamation not just of his person as three in one, but of his work for us as well. He who is our Father because of the work of his Son and the breathing of his Spirit has called us here. And so, as his doorkeeper and butler, the pastor says, *In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit*. And the guests answer with a prayerful, *Amen*. They acknowledge that, yes, that is indeed the one who has drawn them here and invited them. All the things that seem important outside of this hour are as nothing in comparison to what is about to take place. Now we have come into the presence of God. We are always in his presence. But now, because of the cross, the font, the holy table and the tabernacle of the gospel in the pulpit, now we are aware of it in a special way. Let us give attention to him who descends to us and deigns to be our host in this holy hour! We will soon see and hear just how holy that hour is and how important compared to all the other hours of the week.

Let's see. Now that God has invited us into his house and come down to meet with us, what should we talk about? Would this be a good time to pick a bone with him, to let him know how unhappy we are with the way that he has run the world or treated us? That might be a bit presumptuous. Well then, maybe we could start with a cry for help, for the rescue of our pension fund, for some magic potion that will cure our pain wracked bodies, for a miracle cure to solve the problem of living in a family, for rescue from a tyrannical employer and disagreeable neighbors and co-workers. What should we start with?

And here comes a jolting reality check, something that brings us up short and puts everything back into proper perspective: What we start with is the only thing that really matters in time and in eternity. All things else are important in their place, but they all fade into insignificance until we encounter God on this one all important matter:

## **CONFESSION**

Our sin is the one great thing that matters. Luther said it in the very first of the 95 Theses: *When our Lord Jesus Christ says 'Repent!' he means that the entire life of the Christian should be one of repentance!*

But I don't want to repent! I certainly don't want to confess! After all, compared to so many that I know, I'm not really all that bad. And considering the kind of parents I had, the sorts of horrible temptations to which I

am subject in the world, the marvel is that I am as good as I am. Where I have gone astray, it either really wasn't all that bad, or it wasn't all my fault.

One of the hardest things in all the world to say is, *I'm sorry*. The only thing harder is to really mean it. The whole of our nature, the *opinio legis*, resists confession. The world laughs at it and the devil throws every possible obstacle in the way to prevent our repentance and our meaning it when we say the words.

And so what does the Liturgy do? Does it soften the blow and make it easy? Well, yes, in one way it does. For it begins with words of seduction. It lures us. It entices us. Consider carefully each line, each phrase:

*Beloved in the Lord:* Didn't you see the cross when you came into his house? The cross tells you both how terrible sin is - - your sin especially; but it also and even more importantly declares how eager God is to resolve the problem of your sin, the sin that separates you from him. You are his beloved; you can confess anything to the Lord who knows it all already and better than you do, and who nevertheless calls you his *beloved!*

*Let us draw near to God our Father:* No need to hold back, to cower and cringe. He isn't going to hit you or strike you down. He isn't going to say: *You did what?! And that after all the good I've done for you and all the times I've forgiven you in the past.* No, not that! For he is the God who knew us before we were born, knew us in eternity. And knowing us he has chosen to become our Father. Such a God invites us to come and to come again to his house and deal with the one thing that gets in the way of that relationship.

*Let us draw near with a true heart and confess our sins.* Before all the world we wear a mask. No one really knows us or perfectly understands us. Nor, truth to tell, do we want anyone to know us perfectly. We all have secrets that we share with no one. We all wonder what people, what our spouse or our children, would think of us if they really knew it all. But before God there is no point in hiding behind a mask. More than that, there is every reason to be completely honest with him, to strip away the mask, to tell it all, yes, to come to him with a true heart.

*Asking him in the name our Lord Jesus Christ to grant us forgiveness.* We may well beg. In our minds eye we may see ourselves prostrate on the floor before his cross. Disgust and self loathing may fill us and that with good reason.<sup>2</sup> But we have not come to this loving Father alone. Oh no, never that! We come in the name of our dear Lord Jesus Christ. He is our Savior. He is the Anointed One. He is the sin-bearer. He is the Atonement. He is the Sacrifice for sinners slain. Yes, he has already won the forgiveness for which we plead. The Father will not refuse that Son. The Father will not turn aside his sacrifice, his full payment.

Therefore, do not be afraid. Run as the prodigal son to confession, to the open arms of the Father, holding fast the cross of his beloved Son. Triumph over the stubborn flesh and the laughing world and the arrogant devil and confess it all.

And so we do it; lured, enticed, seduced by an implicit promise, we strip away the mask behind which we hide from the world, yes and often from self as well. We pour out from the poisoned well of our soul the dreadful reality:

*Holy and merciful Father* – I do not expect you to change who you are as the all holy one who cannot just ignore sin or wink at it; rather I abandon myself on the equal truth that you cannot and do not want to change who you are, the merciful Father. I know that in you the attributes which we distinguish from one another are all one. I know from your invitation and from the cross above the altar that in Christ they meet and find perfect resolution and satisfaction. Therefore, holy and merciful Father –

*I confess that I am by nature sinful and that I have disobeyed you in my thoughts, words, and actions.* Notice Father, dear Father, I confess first what I am, and only after that what I have done. For I am rotten to the core. I have nothing in my nature that is clean. It is all leprous. It is by nature capable of nothing but sin. Nor

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<sup>2</sup> One my favorite definitions of worship in the Confessions is this: Worship is the exercise of faith in its struggle with despair (AAC XXIV, par. 46, 51 [Kolb 267], Treatise on the Power and Primacy of the Pope, par. 44 [Kolb 338]).

have I been shy in proving it. See my thoughts, words and actions! There is not a one of them that is perfect, not a one done out of perfect love for you and gratitude to you for all you are to me.

*I have done what is evil and failed to do what is good.* There is original sin which totally corrupts my nature. I would neither know about it nor confess it, were it not for the conviction worked in me by the Holy Spirit in the law. That ignorance is doubly perverse, since I have so abundantly given evidence of my total depravity by a life full of actual sin. There are sins of commission, sins that I knew were sins, but I did them anyway. And equally beyond counting are the sins of omission, sins I most often don't even recognize as sin. There is all the good that I could have done, the attention to your Word and to my prayers, the little acts of love to those around me, - - ah, it would take me all day to recount them if I only knew them all.

*For this I deserve your punishment both now and in eternity.* It's no use comparing myself to Hitler or to Stalin or to some murderer or rapist. To the extent that I was capable of evil, I have done evil. The cup of my iniquity is filled to overflowing. I have no excuse. I have no merit to offer of my own. All I can do is admit that I deserve to go to hell a thousand times over in each day of my life. Especially I call to mind how I have deserved that since I was last here in your house.

*I am truly sorry for my sins* – as needful as that is that I be truly sorry, I know that my sorrow atones for not one single sin; I even know that I can never be sorry enough. But still they press me sore like a weight that is too heavy for me. Beneath their dread load -

*And trusting in my Savior Jesus Christ, I pray: Lord have mercy on me, a sinner.*

Father, dear Father, you called me beloved when you invited me to confess. And so I, a sinner, trust in my Savior, your only begotten Son, and clinging to him I pray: Take pity on me in the gutter of my guilt, covered with my shame, corrupted from top to bottom with my sin.

I have spent so great a part of the time allotted me on the Confession because it is so pivotal to everything that follows. The Confession is generally missing altogether in sectarian worship. It is missing because the *Arminians* deny original sin. It is missing in much of Calvinist worship because, while acknowledging the total depravity of man, the need to lament it is obviated by *once saved, always saved*, or perhaps by the so-called double predestination which leaves God responsible for the damnation of the lost. But for us Confession is crucial because of the seriousness of sin. It is crucial because of our innate resistance to admitting our own desperate and constant, our total and absolute need of grace. It is crucial because without it there will be no real appreciation of the gospel whose promise lured us into making confession and whose absolution will relieve us of the dread burden born by Christ for us on the cross. If you are not convinced of the pivotal nature of confession, read Romans 7 and Ephesians 2. Find yourself in the Parable of the Prodigal Son, in the prayer of the publican in the Temple. Consider again Luther's description of our need in his explanation to the Second and Third Articles of the Creed in his Small Catechism, in which he piles up terms that describe us in the totality of our need, so that we may see the more joyfully Christ, the answer to our need, our sin, our despair. Read his *Heidelberg Disputations*, and then read it a second time - - in all likelihood you will not be able to wrap your mind around the weighty points he makes there in one reading. Read Art. I and II of the Formula of Concord. The very first thing that is wrong with much that passes for modern worship is the lack of Confession. To omit Confession is to pander to the Methodist in all of us. To omit Confession is to diminish and trivialize not only Law but ultimately and much more importantly the Gospel. For if I have no need, the solution to my need will seem unimportant. Jesus said the same thing to the Pharisees who objected to the time he spent with sinners: Those who do not know that they are sick have little use or appreciation for the physician (Matt. 9:12-13). In place of both Law and Gospel will come usually a trite presentation of the Third Use of the Law, moralizing, legalism.

While minor liturgies of Matins and Vespers do not contain a formal confession of sins, they do to some extent assume its part in the *Haupt Gottesdienst* by their opening responses: *O Lord, open my lips. And my mouth shall declare your praise.* Especially in the second set of responses they proclaim in prayer our desperate need: *Hasten to save me, O God. O Lord, come quickly to help me.*

Historically this vital part of the Lutheran worship service is of late origin. In the liturgy of the Roman Mass the confession really is supposed to be the priest's own private prayer before the actual liturgy begins. As the Mass is today and as the Anglican Communion observes the Western Rite, neither have the crucial lines *by nature sinful and unclean*. For reasons already noted, this entire introduction to the worship service is missing altogether in most, if not in all, sectarian services. But during the Reformation Luther and Melancthon and even more the second generation of Lutherans had to consider that private confession was no longer mandatory and with the passing of time less and less used - - and that in spite of Luther's frequent and fulsome praise of private absolution.

In German Lutheran worship services the Confession became standard by the end of the 16<sup>th</sup> century. The Confession was spoken in front of the steps of the altar, and the pastor did not go up to the altar until the Confession and Absolution were completed, in order to emphasize that worship needed cleansed souls as a prerequisite of acceptable worship. So important was the Confession that in many places also in this country there was a special *Beicht Gottesdienst* either the night before a Communion Service or earlier in the morning before the *Haupt Gottesdienst*, if that was to be a service with the Sacrament.

In our current hymnal there follows the *Kyrie*. One can argue about the placing of the *Kyrie* here as the concluding part of Confession. It has moved around over the centuries. In our former hymnal it was not part of Confession but came after Absolution and marked the formal beginning of the *Ordinary*. It was not a cry for forgiveness. Rather it was an acknowledgment of our total need of and dependence on God's mercy and grace for all the sorts and conditions of men, for all of our other spiritual and temporal needs.

Its place in other settings of the Liturgy, however, did consider the *Kyrie* a cry for pardon. Bach seems to see that as its role in his great B Minor Mass. It fits in either place. My own thinking about it has changed over the years. If one leaves prayers for spiritual and temporal blessings to the end of the service in the muted litanies of the General Prayer, then I suppose it is best to leave the *Kyrie* where we have it now. When it was after the Absolution in the former hymnal, most people thought it redundant to Confession. We didn't explain it to them. And besides that, the *Kyrie* in earlier years was really the congregational response to a longer litany for all the sorts and conditions of church and state, house and field.

Now comes the part of the service where, if the holy angels were capable of envy, they would envy us pastors for what we have drawn God's people to do and for what we are about to say to them in answer to their confession. But the holy angels are not capable of envy. Instead what a racket they must make of praise to God and loud hallelujahs. For they have been watching. They have been listening with greatest intent and interest. And now, if there is joy in the presence of the angels at one sinner who repents, how great must their joy be at all the people of God assembled in this place pouring out their confession to God and trusting in the merit of his Son for their forgiveness! For now we shall see fulfilled the promise of Jesus that *he who humbles himself will be exalted* (Luke 18:14).

The lines are so clean and clear, so simple. A mere man, yes himself a sinner, hiding under a robe rises to stand in the place of God and to declare with God's full authority behind him, the cross towering above him, *As a called servant of Christ and by his authority, I forgive you all your sins in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit*. There it is! The whole definition of the holy office of the ministry: The servant of Christ in the midst of the people of God. He has been sent by Christ through those he serves to do this one great thing: To forgive, forgive, forgive the sins of the penitent. In spirit they are on their knees or prostrate before the altar. And now, now with simple words spoken by a sinful man, they are raised up to the heights of heaven. For Christ has won their pardon! See, here I declare it to you, not by virtue of my merit or yours, but by virtue of my office backed up by Christ's promise and by his all sufficient merit. See, here I proclaim it to you as the one sent from the heart of God to you; I proclaim it in the name of him whose house you are visiting; I proclaim it in the name of him who has become your Savior-brother; I proclaim it in the name of him who breathes the words that I am speaking! The whole of the undivided, eternal, holy Trinity agrees with himself in

the matter. Fully, freely, eagerly, willingly he forgives. See, his Word declares it; his cross has won it; and God is not a man that he should lie or his Word deceive!

I've often thought that a great sigh of relief goes up from the hearts of many among those confessing; it goes up to the throne of God at those words of Absolution. My own thought and prayer every time I hear those words is: *Can it really be so? You have not yet become bored with my confession or disgusted by it and me? Yes, it is true! You have put the words on the lips of your pastor. He said it because you have said it.*

So the redeemed people of God respond with *Amen!* That's a confession of faith and a prayer at the same time. It is addressed to God who is speaking behind the pastor and through his words. *Amen* - It is true, O God, what your pastor has said, and I believe it because your Word has the power not only to wash away and wipe out my sin so great and deep; it has even the power to bring me to trust that you do truly forgive, forgive, forgive. And so I say, *Amen!*

There follows the call to respond with more than just *Amen*. If the angels rejoice over one sinner who repents, how can we who are forgiven fail to join in their hymn of praise. Traditionally the pastor intoned the first line of the *Gloria in Excelsis*, speaking for the angels. Then the people of God joined in with this exuberant cry of praise and thanksgiving for all that God is and for all that he is for us. It used to follow the *Kyrie* and was seen as a thanksgiving hymn of adoration not only for Absolution but also for God's expected answer to the *Kyrie* and the litanies that attended it. In many of the German liturgies, the pastor sang the opening line in Latin and the congregation responded with the rest in German.<sup>3</sup> The *Gloria* as part of a number of liturgies is so old that no one knows exactly when it first was written. St. Athanasius makes mention of it, and it was in common use in the Western Church by the end of the 5<sup>th</sup> century. It runs along lines similar to those used in the great *Te Deum* (whose author is arguably St. Ambrose). The *Gloria* was usually omitted during Advent and Lent. It was thought to be a bit too exuberant for the Penitential Seasons; either a seasonal hymn or the *Benedictus* was sung in its place.

What a hymn this *Gloria* is! Can you count all of the doctrines contained in it? Is it not a wonderful application of that beloved dogmatic principle: *Theologia est habitus practicus!* In a train that runs on steam of its own it races forward:

*God is on high* – So high is he that he is separated from all that is created and cannot in any way be confused with it. Creation is not part of him nor he of it. He is the totally other.

*And on earth peace, good will toward men* – But he whom the heaven of heavens cannot contain draws near to us with gifts. His gift is his peace, a peace which comes only in the forgiveness of sin which we have just received. His gift is his own good will for creatures fallen so far that they could not rise from death and hell, nor could they assist in their rising. No, it all has come from Christ; for this is the hymn of the angels announcing his Incarnation to the lowly shepherds and now to us as well. That's why he has come, to win God's peace and impart his gracious good will in the accomplishment of our redemption. And the objective justification won by all that he has done has become ours, become subjective, in the proclamation of Absolution.

Therefore we worship and adore. Not to us, never to us, but to you be all glory and praise and thanksgiving. Do you see again a reality check? What is human life apart from the message already heard and that will be heard yet again but vanity, boasting, lies and deceit and all to the praise and glory of man who is but dust and ashes. But here is reality: To him who wins our peace and gives us his good will be all glory and adoration!

The middle section of the *Gloria* appears to be its oldest part. How completely the hymn is a confession of the doctrine of the Trinity. How altogether Christo-centric it is. How beautifully again it gives us a reality check: All that we seek from God and all that we receive from him comes by virtue of the sacrifice of the Lamb. He is and ever remains *Christus pro nobis*. He will receive our prayers for all that is needful in this life and the

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<sup>3</sup> Luther in the German Mass did not include this ancient hymn but instead inserted a German hymn with much the same emphasis. Our own German liturgy followed his example with the hymn *Allein Gott in der Höh' sei Ehr.*

next. For he has taken away our sin and now sits exalted at the right hand of the Father. He has full power. He has complete authority. He has loved us to the end and loves us still. With full voice we worship him in union with the Father who has now become our Father, and the Holy Spirit who makes us holy by his effective presence in the Word.

### **The Salutation and the Prayer of the Day**

Too often the Salutation is treated as a throw-away line that just marks a shift to the next part of the Liturgy. But it really is more than that. The Salutation, to be sure, marks this and other major shifts in the Liturgy. But as well it beautifully acknowledges the union of God's spokesman and God's people, a union found in God's house and formed by his Word. The pastor is about to do something that is awesome. With God's people he is about to speak to God. That's not a small thing. He is about to ask God to accomplish his good and gracious will in his people through the Word which God will shortly address to them through the mouth of his pastor. Therefore in anticipation of God's favorable disposition and answer he says –

*The Lord be with you* – as I pray for you and you pray with me. Since he has already forgiven us, we can be sure that this greeting is not merely a pious wish or an empty hope. It rests on the assurance that the Word of God is effective, that it is indeed a *means of grace*. And God's people respond: *And also with you*. For without God's gracious presence with you, your person and your prayer, dear pastor, will be an abomination, presumptuous, and of no avail. Ah, but God is with you and your spirit as you enter into his holy presence to ask a blessing on his Word which he has already promised to give. And so we give our attention to the brief sentences of the prayer and happily add at its conclusion our *Amen*. God will not cast us off in our prayer. He will not strike down either us or his pastor for daring to say it.

The Prayer of the Day usually sums up the blessing we seek from God through his Word. (Admittedly the connection is sometimes difficult to see.) It therefore anticipates what is coming in the Word we are about to hear. If we paid better attention to that prayer, it would help us focus more clearly on the coming readings and on the sermon itself during which God will pour forth the blessings sought in the Prayer of the Day.

### **The Word**

Since this section of the Liturgy belongs almost entirely to the *Propers*, we will be brief. It is perhaps enough to emphasize that the readings for the day are not just warm up exercises for what *I* am going to say in the pulpit. I remember how annoying it was when one of our vicars regularly stumbled through the reading of the lessons for the day. It seemed that he had not even looked at them before the service. The pastor will certainly remember that the readings are the words of the living God to his people, worthy therefore of careful attention from both the ones who speak them and those who hear them. They express the thought summed up in the Prayer of the Day and they have (or should have) a close connection to the text and content of the sermon. All of the *Propers* have a common emphasis; they are not grab bags of disconnected thoughts. To the extent that the pastor gives some expression of their coherence, to that extent it will be easier for God's people to remember both the readings and the sermon. And to that extent there will be less of God's Word that falls as seed on the path way or in the underbrush of the easily distracted mind, making no impression and bringing forth no fruit.

The practice of multiple readings is as old as Christian worship. It is a continuation of the synagogue practice of readings from the Law and the Prophets. Already in the days of the Apostolic Fathers readings were arranged from the writings of the apostles and from the gospels. Readings from the Old Testament were sometimes added, sometimes not. The Epistle lesson was often thought of as an extension of the work of St. John the Baptist, as preparation for the hearing of the Gospel. Accordingly the reading of the Gospel was surrounded with much ceremony, with candles and incense. We still have the echoes of that ceremony and emphasis when we rise for the reading of the Gospel and attend to it with chants of thanksgiving and praise. Again, it's not just busy work designed to put people into a listening frame of mind. The readings are God's



descent from his throne on high to the hearts and minds of his people. By his Word he wants to strengthen and cheer, to warn and console, to bind them to himself and then in service to one another.

The responses of *Glory be to you, O Lord!* and *Thanks be to you, O Christ!* reflect well the thought that God is the one speaking to us, that Christ is truly and actually present with us in his house and in those readings. How could we not respond thus when we are thus honored by our God and Savior who has again shown himself to us in the might and majesty of his Word for us, his guests? How could we respond other than with praise and thanksgiving that he has done it in the lowliness and humility of words, not in the terrifying thunder and lightening of Sinai?

Some argue about introductions to the readings. Those who dislike the practice of introducing them maintain that anything that the pastor says will be a distraction from the important matter of God's own speaking. Frankly, I don't quite follow that argument. Were it valid, then one might just read the sermon text too, and leave it to the Holy Spirit to unfold it for the people of God. Nevertheless the point is well taken, if introductions to the readings become mini sermons. Introductions should be short and to the point; and the point should be to help people see the main point of the reading and how it sets or furthers the theme of the season/day. Sometimes a commentary in the bulletin can be useful in this respect. Given all the space taken up with commercials for this and that in bulletins these days, a short commentary on the theme of the day and a few lines on how each of the readings shows or explains or deepens our appreciation for that theme shouldn't be considered too much for people to bear. If they can endure a page on the upcoming bowling tournament of the men's club, another on the impending outing of the Ladies Aid to the candy factory, and yet another on the school's order sheet for pizza, the proceeds of which will fund new basketballs, a page that sums up the gifts of God in his Word for that day shouldn't be thought of as a bother.

## The Creed

In some services the Creed follows the readings for the day and in others it follows the sermon. It doesn't really matter much whether it comes in the one place or the other. In which ever place we use it the point will remain that the Creed is a reflection again of the doctrine of the means of grace. The Word of God has created the Creed as the response of God's people to his Word. Its recitation is a delightful and an exciting confession of faith.

Experts argue about whether the Creed is a prayer or a proclamation, whether it is a sacrificial or a sacramental element of the worship service. Why can't it be both? It is our response to God, a response of faith in his Word, a faith formed and fashioned by that Word. But at the same time with the Creed we say to one another: *No, you're not crazy and you're not alone! This is what I believe too, and that in union not only with you but with the church universal for the past 2000 years!*

Traditionally the Apostles' Creed is used to remind us of our Baptism. After all, the Apostles' Creed owes its origins to the baptismal formula. Its use was intended to remind us of what God has done for us in Baptism and our consequent pledges of faithfulness to him and to his Word. While it is a confession of the faith of the universal church, it is an especially personal confession too: The church is not baptized collectively but individuals are baptized one at a time. Hence the pronoun: *I* is the operative pronoun in this confession of faith. The Apostles' Creed is most commonly used in services without Communion.

The Nicene Creed is the confession of the church collectively, of the church militant in her battles for the truth and against heresy. Its use in the Liturgy of the Western Church was considered of special importance as a counter to the Arian heresy that for so long persisted in parts of Spain, France and Germany. At the words *For us and for our salvation, he came down from heaven ...* there was traditionally a pause in the service to give people time to kneel in awe before the great mystery of the Incarnation. At the very least they bowed their heads when reciting the words *and he became man*. St. Bernard comments that there are three great miracles; the first is that God could and would become man; the second is that he did it in the womb of the Virgin; the third is that we actually believe it. Our use of the Nicene Creed acknowledges all three of these great miracles. When the Liturgy was sung, the pastor sang the first line by himself. I am assuming that that is where the practice comes

from that in sung Masses, including Bach's great *B Minor Mass*, the singular is used: *Credo*. We, in keeping with the emphasis on the truth that this is the confession of the church, we use *We believe* instead of *I believe*.

Which ever Creed is used, whether the more irenic Apostles' or the more polemical Nicene, the Creed too presents us with a reality check. Not all religions are just subjective opinion, one as good as another, or at least all of them possessing part of the same truth. NO! We are not relativists or existentialists. We confess a faith whose content is absolute truth, saving truth, historical truth. That's what makes Christianity unique. That's what makes membership in most lodges and in the Scouts impossible for us - - such memberships would flatly contradict the confession of this faith on Sunday morning. Indeed we so joyfully confess the one, true, catholic and apostolic faith precisely because of what God has given us in his Son and through his saving Word and Sacraments. It would be insulting to him and utter folly for us, and that in the extreme, were we to come to his house, eat his blessings in Word and Sacraments and then not even confess our faith and trust in him. What would people think? Have we just come to a museum, perhaps a musical? No, not that, never that! Our faith matters and so too does our confession of it! Each of the Lutheran Confessions begins with a pledge of loyalty to the historic Creeds. We join in their insistence that we are members of the church universal when share in that pledge of loyalty in response to the Word in the *Haupt Gottesdienst*.

Luther beautifully expressed his love and appreciation for the Creed, especially in his comments at the conclusion of the Third Article in *The Large Catechism*. In the interest of "useful brevity" (- - a phrase much loved by the Fathers who were about to spend another 10 pages on some point!), permit me to cite some of his last few lines on the subject:

*... the Creed brings pure grace and makes us righteous and acceptable to God. Through this knowledge we come to love and delight in all the commandments of God because we see here in the Creed how God gives himself completely to us, with all his gifts and power, to help us keep the Ten Commandments: the Father gives us all creation, Christ all his works, the Holy Spirit all his gifts.* (LC, Third Article, par. 69 [Kolb, p. 440])

The Confession of Faith is followed by the sermon hymn and the sermon. Again, because these are *Propers*, we will just make a couple of observations about them. The sermon hymn is such a Lutheran thing: We want to prepare and be prepared for the Word of God that we are about to hear. We want to remember and to remind the pastor before he ever gets into the pulpit that what is coming is not about him but about the One who sent him. How jarring to the senses and offensive to the souls of the faithful if, after a hymn that focuses our attention on Christ, the pastor should mount the pulpit to talk about himself or to imagine that he is there to entertain! The ambassador comes with the message of his masters; the pastor comes from the palace and shrine of the living God – from his Word; he comes with a message from the heart of God for his blood bought children and heirs. For the preacher to imagine that stories from his own life are worthy metaphors for all things sacred and profane is to betray an arrogance unworthy of the servant of the servants of God.

Having sung the hymn we enter the pulpit for the most awesome work that God has given us to do. Now in such a special sense we get to be *pastor*, i.e. the shepherd of God's blood bought flock, as we lead his sheep to and through the pure waters and nourishing pastures of his Word. Personally I always found that to be an awesome thing, so awesome that my joy at the opportunity and the honor was mixed with no small amount of dread in the face of my own ignorance and limitations. The pastor needs to hold fast to the promises of God to speak through the mouths of his servants who are faithful to his Word. He needs to cling to the promise so often given that the Word faithfully proclaimed will accomplish God's good pleasure. Luther was so fixated on that truth that he once remarked that there are many times when the pastor can confess his sins; when he leaves the pulpit should not be one of them. For the work was God's work and so too will be its fruit.

And so we prepare for the one time in the week when we will have the greatest number of God's people listening to us. We have before us the simple and the learned, those who listen to God's Word every day and those who think of it rarely. We have those who have come with aching hearts and those who have become very

comfortable with their sins. It is all too awesome; God should have sent angels to do it, or at least someone better than I am. But he didn't. Through the foolishness of preaching he is pleased to accomplish his good and gracious will. And he chose me to do it here, at this time, in this place. Therefore I bow my head and beg for his mercy while I prepare. On entering the pulpit I bow it again and ask him to bless what he has given me to do and to say. My own prayer in the pulpit since my seminary days has been an ancient sacristy prayer: *Veni Creator Spiritus! Pasce pastorem / duc ducem / da datur / aperi aperturo / emittis spiritum tuum et creabuntur et renovabis faciem terrae.*

Just a word about the Apostolic Greeting from Ephesians 1:2 at the beginning of the sermon and Votum from Philipians 4:7 at its conclusion: These beautifully focus attention on Christ and the grace he extends to us in his Word preached and proclaimed. Their use at the beginning and the end of the sermon is something uniquely Lutheran, again with that unique Lutheran focus on the doctrine of the means of grace as the *causa efficiens* of our salvation. The words themselves are means of grace, not just churchy mood creating salutations; that is, they convey what they say, God's grace, mercy and peace. And that is what the sermon is intended to do as well. They are a fitting way to begin and end words that are intended to expound in greater detail what the whole of the service seeks to do: Show us that God who calls us to account that he may forgive, who shows us his Son that we may all the more love and trust in him, who gives us his Spirit that we may the more nearly live in him who died and rose again for us and for our salvation.

### **The Offertory, Offering and the Prayer of the Church**

Most I suppose think of the Offertory as a response of the congregation to the sermon. Actually and historically this whole next part of the service is really a preparation for the Communion Liturgy. But I see no crime if we think of it as pointing in both directions at the same time.

If we think of the Offertory as a response to the sermon, then it is the prayer of the faithful that after they have been washed with the gospel, they may have cleansed hearts to live what they have heard. If we think of it as pointing ahead, then it is a renewed and solemn prayer to God that he may give us proper and pure attention and devotion to the next miracle that he is about to perform in our presence and for our growth in grace.

In the ancient church, up until about the end of the Middle Ages, the Offering was done in procession by the faithful to the altar. There they would lay their gifts which were to be used for the support of the church and especially for the poor, for orphans and widows. From those gifts would be taken the bread and the wine which would be used in the Sacrament.

The prayers that follow the Offering reflect the unity of God and his people and the unity of his people with one another. We were passive suppliants at Confession. But now we have been cleansed. We have been renewed. We have been fed and strengthened by the Word. And so we respond with thanks to our Host in the offerings that we bring for the benefit of the church and for those in need. It's the liturgical equivalent of a guest bringing some small token of appreciation when invited to dine at the home of another. We join to those offerings our prayers for the church and the state and all sorts and conditions of men. In those prayers we again have another reality check: All that is good comes from God, and it comes from him so that we may give it back to him again in our hearing, in our devotion, in our prayers, in our lives with one another. I've always especially liked the way that the prophet Joel puts it when he prays for deliverance from pestilence and famine; he doesn't ask for rescue so that he and his people will again have enough to eat and be saved from starvation. No; rather he prays that God will restore the harvest so that they will have something to bring to the Temple, something to give back to him (Joel 2:14).

It is this section of the Liturgy that underwent the most dramatic reformation during the Reformation. In the Roman liturgy the prayers are chuck full of so much false doctrine that this part of the liturgy all by itself make the Roman Mass what our Confessions call it: an abomination. For here the priest calls on the people and all the saints to pray for him that the sacrifice that the priest is about to make may be acceptable to God in reparation for the sins of the living and the dead. Can you even count how many abominable heresies there are there? During the Lutheran Reformation the General Prayer which had existed in a rudimentary form

generations earlier was reintroduced. Initially it appears as a series of petitions or litanies based on the petitions of the Lord's Prayer. Later the Lord's Prayer became the conclusion of the General Prayer and the intercessory prayers. These prayers were more and more clearly separated from the Liturgy of the Sacrament. It is that separation which makes us think of these prayers as a response to the Word proclaimed rather than a preparation for the Sacrament. We used to have more of a connection between these prayers and the Sacrament when the last of them began with the invitation: *Let us pray for our Communicants.*

The prayers here offered are not supposed to be a rerun of the sermon, just in case people didn't get it the first time. While its opening lines may well reflect the theme of the day and of the sermon itself, the prayers then move on as expressions of our Christian love and concern for our lives in the church and in the world. They go from the universal to the particular, from the world and the church at large to the parochial and the individual needs of brothers and sisters in Christ. They are prayers in which the pastor and the congregation are united with Christ in prayer; for they all end with an invoking of his name as the reason why we dare to pray and expect to be heard. In the Old Testament the high priest spoke to God wearing a breastplate with stones that bore the names of the children of Israel. With no breastplate visible we nevertheless approach with the names and cares of our people inscribed on our hearts. Christ ornaments our prayers with his blood and adds to them his merit; he carries them behind the veil into the heart of the Father in the heavenly temple not made with hands. It is a holy time indeed!

Our hymnal has placed the Lord's Prayer at the end of the general and intercessory prayers. Formerly it was part of the Communion Liturgy. The move to my mind is a good one. The Lord's Prayer is such a perfect summation of all that we have to say to God. We pray it with total confidence that it is a prayer pleasing to him, since his Son has taught us to pray it. It presents us with yet another reality check: It is a prayer in which we express our complete dependence on God for all good things spiritual and temporal. And who could fail to notice it: Spiritual needs dominate. Other needs are important too and they find their place in the fourth petition. But the most important thing in our life is not health and wealth; it is that God's name be holy among us. This is the prayer of those who remain children to their dying day and are happy that that is so. Clearly we could spend a day on the prayer and its beauty and still only scratch the surface of all that is in it. Permit me to encourage you to read Luther's comments on this prayer in his Large Catechism. For the present, allow me just two observations:

1) Notice the arrangement of the petitions. We do not ask for forgiveness until we have asked for every possible spiritual and temporal blessing. Since Jesus has taught us to pray this way, we have every confidence that these petitions are granted generously and in abundance by God in his Word and in his providence. Now then, if God has given us everything that we need for the support of body and soul in the first four petitions, what possible excuse could we have for sin in the future? Absolutely no excuse at all! All our needs have been provided for. Thus fear, doubt, greed and lust should reasonably have no place in our lives. Nevertheless Jesus knows us so well and loves us still. And so he bids us still pray for forgiveness and deliverance from the evil one. He knows that having everything, we will forget, and through our fault, our own fault, our own most grievous fault we will not only sin but at times even run headlong into the arms of the Tempter. What an amazing thing, just the placing of the fifth and sixth petitions!

2) Whether the doxology at the end of the prayer is canonical or not, we will leave for others to argue. To my mind it is a perfect ending to the prayer: So great are the blessings we seek in it, they could be granted only by him who has all power, the whole kingdom, and all of the glory in his keep. And therefore with confidence we lay these petitions at the feet of our Father and confidently say: *Amen!*

## **The Sacrament**

No section of the liturgy has undergone more tinkering and tampering than this section. Our hymnal's presentation of the Sacrament appears to climb mountains of controversy in order to get to the essentials clean and pure. It concentrates, as do a number of Lutheran liturgies going back to the Reformation and before, on the

basics of what God is doing in the Sacrament. It lets God speak and God act with as little interference from his minister as possible.

And so this most ancient section of the Liturgy begins with that customary greeting in the Preface which signals that something awesome is about to take place. For the miracle about to happen we ask God's blessing on all present, pastor and congregation. The special nature of this miracle is that God through the real presence of Christ in the Sacrament will make personal what up until now has been general and universal. That's the special role of the sacraments. Now especially the one hiding behind the pillar in the temple and still smiting his breast in despair because of his guilt should come out from behind the pillar and look into the face of God with rejoicing. If he had to struggle with unbelief when God through the pastor spoke a general absolution, perhaps the miracle of Christ's presence will win him. For if Jesus feeds us with himself, with the very price of our salvation, then when God looks at us, he sees - - Jesus! How can God then still be angry? The Sacrament is a banquet of forgiveness and salvation, yes, even for the one who struggled to believe the Word of Absolution, and who, even if just for the moment, lost in that dread battle.

*Lift up your hearts! We lift them up to the Lord.* Yes, we should indeed lift up our hearts to the Lord. That is such a full and beautiful expression. We lift up the heart in confession; let God see it, every bit of it, all that no one else will ever see or know. We lift it up in joyful expectation and adoration before the mystery that so soon Jesus will come to us with the very price of our salvation. Having no gold or goods on the night in which he was betrayed, he nevertheless wrote a will. In it he left us a bequest: Himself! And how much is packed into that! He gives himself to us as individuals, but in fellowship with and not apart from one another, in the fellowship of the church.

Then we sing one of those wonderful biblical expressions of understatement: *Let us give thanks to the Lord. It is good and right so to do!* The Sacrament is called the Eucharist from this line of the liturgy.

*The Proper Preface* follows and then the exultant *Sanctus*. The *Sanctus* is one of those great masterpieces of solemn simplicity. Heaven and earth are joined as we intone the chant of the angels in Isaiah 6. The Old and New Testament are joined as we pass from the song of the angels to the Old Testament hymn sung by the disciples on Jesus' entry into Jerusalem. It is the song of the church in this place and of the church for over a thousand years, biding welcome to him who comes to us so completely in his Sacrament.

The *Words of Institution* follow. This is the part that, oddly enough, gets most argued about. Luther took a meat cleaver to the formula of the Mass that, upon close examination, exalts not Christ but the priest and the pope who sent him. For all the church in heaven and earth joins, as already noted, to pray that the priest's sacrifice may be acceptable. After Luther's meat cleaver hacked away all of that abomination, others sought to expand the *Words of Institution* with an assortment of prayers that were often more didactic than prayerful or that emphasize our sacrifice of thanksgiving more than Christ's gift to us in the Sacrament. Luther wanted God's Word to say it all. Personally, I'm satisfied with that. Given that people these days have the attention span of gerbil, some might want to argue that a little more should be said by way of the real nature and blessing of the Sacrament. And it is certainly true that also in our circles there are a lot of silly notions that persist: *Dear, should we go to Communion this Sunday?* Ans.: *I don't know. Did we go last time?* That all too common approach betrays the notion that in the Sacrament we are obeying a law or doing God some sort of favor. That our people need to be reminded more than just in Confirmation Class or on Maundy Thursday of the nature and blessing of the Sacrament cannot be argued. Whether the sacramental liturgy is the best time to do that reminding or not is worth thinking about. But if one decided to do it there, he will do it best if he is very brief and to the point. Again, Luther's emphasis here is worth remembering: It's not about you; it's about him and his gift of himself for you.

The *Pax* follows the *Words of Institution*. Luther often praised this little sentence in the Liturgy (though he did not include this line in the *Deutsche Messe*). Like all of the other blessings of the Liturgy, this too is an application of the doctrine of the means of grace. For the *Pax* gives what it says, and it is thus the best preparation for the reception of the Sacrament. It emphasizes the fruit of absolution and the blessing about to be imparted in yet another wondrous way in the Sacrament. The *Amen* of God's people declares their faith in what is offered in absolution, in the *Pax* itself, and in the Sacrament about to be received. Jesus spoke of this *Pax*,

this peace, so fulsomely just before he went to gain it for us (John 14:25-27) and it was the first blessing that he gave his disciples when he came to them after his Resurrection (John 20:19-21) - - and he said twice in less than a minute. Could he have been more in earnest or emphatic in the way that he gave this gift of peace?

The Words of Institution follow. In them we set aside earthly elements for a sacred use. The *Verba* do not change the elements. There is no magic involved in their recitation. Arguments about the moment of the Sacrament, frankly, have always seemed a little silly to me: The Sacrament is whole cloth; no Word of God, no Sacrament; no use, i.e. reception, no Sacrament either. The rule still applies: *Extra usum, nullum sacramentum!* I've always thought it interesting that the very order of Christ's words suggests that. He doesn't say: *This is my body; take eat.* He says: *Take eat; this is my body.* In it all it's the *what* that matters, not the *when*. Arguments about *when* tend not only to distract from the *what*; they tend to shift the emphasis away from Christ and his gift on to the pastor and his acts - - the opposite of the intent of the Lutheran reform of the communion liturgy.

Then comes the beautiful *Agnus Dei*, an addition to the communion liturgy from about the year 700. It again gets our priorities right. All that we need comes from the Lamb who was slain. All that we claim is his mercy, not our merit, our excuses, our good intentions. And now we are about to receive the evidence of his mercy and the peace which is its fruit in the banquet spread before us. And that's what the Sacrament is all about: His giving what he won on the cross, our receiving thereby all that he is and all that he has.

What is there left now but to give thanks. We sing the *Nunc Dimittis*, following the usage of some of the earliest Reformation liturgies - - though not Luther's *Deutsche Messe*. It is a most fitting thanksgiving, uniting as it does the Incarnation with our Lord's gift of himself for us and our joyful acknowledgement that we have received him and his peace. The Post Communion liturgy again is very brief and to the point. There is just this one hymn of thanksgiving, as there was hymn at the close of the first communion service in the Upper Room and then a brief prayer. The first of the post-Communion prayers in our hymnal was written by Luther, or is, at least, his re-working of an older prayer.

Our Liturgy omits the closing *Salutation* and the *Benedicamus* and goes straight to the *Benediction*. Personally I would have preferred keeping the two preparation lines before the *Benediction*. But, be that as it may, the important thing to keep in mind here is that the *Benediction* is not just a churchy *Goodbye! Y'all have a nice day!* No, it is the one blessing that God commanded in the Bible (Numbers 6:22-27). The pastor in his final priestly act raises his hands and communicates from the God who sent him the blessing that the whole service has intended to give to his people. How does it work, that this simple act blesses people, makes a difference? I don't know the answer to that any more than I can fathom how God's gospel otherwise blesses us. Again, I know the *what*; the *how* is God's concern. And so we close as we began, with a threefold blessing, with the Trinity. And so we close as we began, with the sign of the cross by which every blessing is ours. And so we close as we began, with knees trembling just a bit at the awesome work which the Lord our God has entrusted to us and which he now has brought to conclusion. *Was kann man ja weiter sagen: Gott sei Lob und Dank in aller Ewigkeit für seine unaussprechliche Gnade! - - und dass solch ein Werk mir, einem armen Sünder, von Gott anvertraut ist!*

How could anyone think of this worship as boring or tedious or irrelevant? If people find it thus, perhaps that's in part the pastor's own fault when he offers the Liturgy as though he found it boring and tedious. Perhaps it is our fault in general that we so rarely explain its beauty and its historic function in the preservation of orthodoxy over the centuries. After all, in the darkest days of the Arian heresy, to mention but one example, it was the Christo-centric hymns and liturgy that proclaimed the gospel and kept faith alive. To this very day in many a liturgical church where heresy and rank unbelief rule in the pulpit, it is the Western Rite alone that still proclaims law and gospel. To get people used to a new form of worship every ten minutes or so is to make it all the easier for some *Ketzer* to introduce new doctrines with ever new and changing forms.

Is the Liturgy of the Western Rite written in stone or divinely inspired? Obviously not; it has undergone change throughout its history. Is it a foregone conclusion that anyone who tampers with the Western Rite is a heretic or at least the way preparer for a heretic? No, that too is not inevitable. *Aber doch ...* The changes that we make in forms of worship should reflect fidelity to the purposes of worship mentioned at the beginning of

this paper. Changes should be chaste and slow. Changes should be more than the whims of the moment and the preferences of the individual. And certainly changes should not be designed to pander to the popular lust for diversion and entertainment. Let me say it one more time: *Wir besuchen den Gottesdienst*. We visit God in his house at his invitation to receive the banquet he has prepared for us there. We behold his glory in the lowliness of the font, of the table, of the *Tabernaculum* of his Word in the pulpit. Whatever we do then, let it be done with that in mind, and we will probably not go far wrong. Yes, and we probably will not go all that far away from the Liturgy of the Western Rite either. Permit me to close with the ancient prayer that I use at the close of every liturgy, whether celebrated at church or at home:

*Adoramus Te, Christe, et benedicimus Tibi, quia per sanctam  
crucem Tuam redemisti mundum et me. Adoramus Te, Christe,  
et benedicimus Tibi! Amen.*

*D. Deutschlander  
The Feast of the Annunciation  
March 25, 2008*