

Worship 101: The Collect, Scripture Readings and the Sermon

We continue our look at the Divine Service with what is known as the Collect. This is the prayer that we bring before the Lord after singing the Hymn of Praise. In the Collect we “collect” our hearts and minds as a congregation into one central theme. This prayer is also known as the “Prayer of the Day”. The collects usually follow a specific pattern: 1. the address 2. the basis for the prayer 3. the petition 4. the benefit desired 5. the conclusion.

We see this outline in the collect for Holy Trinity Sunday: “Almighty and everlasting God, (address) You have given us grace to acknowledge the glory of the eternal Trinity by the confession of a true faith and to worship the Unity in the power of the Divine Majesty. (basis for the prayer) Keep us steadfast in this faith and defend us from all adversities; (the petition and benefit desired) for you, O Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, live and reign, one God, now and forever.” (conclusion) The conclusions to all the collects make reference to the triune nature of God: One God in three Persons.

After the collect is prayed the next part of the Divine Service is the Scripture readings. As portions of the Old Testament were read in the Jewish synagogue in Jesus’ day (Luke 4:16-20) so in the New Testament era selected Scriptures are read as part of the worship service. In 1 Timothy 4:13 St. Paul told Timothy that the Bible was to be read during Sunday morning worship: “Until I come, devote yourself to the public reading of Scripture, to preaching and to teaching.” The “public” reading of Scripture takes place on Sunday as the church gathers for worship.

Today we have three passages of Scripture printed on the back of the bulletin: The Old Testament reading, the Epistle (letter) reading and the Holy Gospel that is taken from Matthew, Mark, Luke and John. Over the centuries, certain lessons (portions) of the Bible became associated with specific times of the church year. On the Day of Pentecost, one of the oldest church celebrations, we have a reading from the book of Acts which tells what happened on the first Day of Pentecost when the Holy Spirit came upon the church in His fullness. Old Testament prophecies concerning Jesus’ birth naturally fit with the Advent season. The stories of Jesus’ birth are read during the time of Christmas. Readings that involve the Passion of our Lord that is His suffering and death for our sins are used in the season of Lent. Easter focuses attention on Christ’s resurrection and what it means for us.

After the Old Testament and Epistle readings the congregation stands for the reading of the Gospel. In the Gospel we hear the very words of Jesus and so stand as a way of honoring Christ whose word we now hear. In the ancient church an “alleluia” was sung as a signal that the Gospel was about to be read. We continue this tradition today where before the Gospel we sing: “Alleluia, Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life. Alleluia.” (John 6:68) During Lent there is a different way of signaling the Gospel lesson. It is taken from Joel 2:13: “Return to the Lord, your God, for He is gracious and merciful, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love.” “Returning to God” is a way of describing repentance which is also a theme for the season of Lent.”

After the Scripture readings a hymn is sung followed by the Sermon. In the sermon Christ speaks His word through the pastor. We look upon the words of the pastor from the pulpit as being the very word of God to us. As Jesus told the ministers He sent out in Luke 10:16: “He who listens to you listens to Me.”

Next time we’ll look at the creeds we confess on Sunday mornings: The Apostles’, the Nicene and the Athanasian.

In Christ,
Pastor Bloom