



## Reflections on our Anglican Liturgy 25<sup>th</sup> October 2020

Following on from a conversation that I shared with one of our parishioners last week, I found myself hitting the books, in order to refresh my memory regarding the origins of our liturgy. The ordering of the Taizé service last week was quite intriguing – as it seemed a bit unusual, when compared with the liturgies that we see in the prayer book – offered for use across the diocese. Yes, while the wording of the prayers in the Taizé service were familiar, the ordering of the service itself seemed a bit different.

Initially, I was drawn to the liturgies in the 1549 BCP (our first prayer book), which I then compared to some of our more recent revisions. And, while acknowledging the theological movement that we can see in the editing and revisions down through the centuries, I think all of our prayer books affirm the intention of good liturgy – they maintain a distinct flow or cadence that can facilitate an unfolding experience of God. The Sunday Eucharist seems to be an obvious example – as it includes a gathering rite, the reading of scripture, times of prayer and participation in the sharing of the sacraments (Reconciliation, Eucharist and Blessing). Clearly, the crafting of good liturgy is intentional - as it guides the congregation through an unfolding experience of the sacred and the divine.

Our modern Sunday service begins with the gathering rite, which includes the welcome prayers, the Gloria and the collect. (In a way, the gathering rite prepares the faithful to receive the word of God in scripture.) Scripture is then presented and accompanied by some interpretation in the flow of the readings, the Gospel, the sermon and the creed. Following on from the creed, we begin to identify the applications for the Christian Gospel that we share. In particular, the prayers of the people and the general confession offer a period of critical reflection and self-examination. Within our modern service, we are then ready to receive the fullness of God's grace in both absolution and the celebration of the Eucharist. We are united to God (made members of the one body), through the example of Christ and the intention to unite our will to the divine will (justification through faith). Following on from the Eucharist, fully fed and nurtured by the grace of God, we are then sent out for ministry in the world with the post communion prayer, blessing and dismissal.

One could argue that this very measured flow can also be found in earlier liturgies. According to the outline provided by Sykes and Booty, in their work entitled "The Study of Anglicanism", the Eucharist in the 1549 BCP begins with the introit hymn and the gathering rite - which is then followed by the Gloria and the collect. As with our modern service, the faithful would then have the opportunity to listen to the readings (including the Gospel), which would then be followed by the sermon, the creed and offertory. The 1549 Eucharistic prayer would be said aloud, including the prayers of the people. It's interesting to note that before receiving communion, both the priest and the people would share the general confession, absolution and the prayer of humble access. (I suspect the intention was to create a link between the sacrificial nature of discipleship and the sacrificial nature of Christ's earthly ministry and passion.)

Once again, in the ordering of this service, we see a measured flow, as the faithful are gathered, fed by scripture, shown its relevance in the sermon, creeds and prayers, led inward by the examination of conscience, given absolution and then united fully in the celebration of the Eucharist. In other words, through the ordering of the creeds, readings and prayers of Sunday worship, the faithful are drawn deeper and deeper into the mystery of God's love, expressed fully in both Christ and the life of the Christian Church.

From what I've just described, it's easy to see that the order of service has largely remained unchanged. For those of you who are interested in such things, I will try to very briefly outline some of the significant changes that did creep into the service. The 1549 prayer book was followed by the 1552 BCP, which saw the Eucharistic prayer abbreviated. The so called "Black Rubric" was introduced to deny the real presence of our Lord in the Eucharist. (This rubric was dropped from the 1559 revision, following the death of Queen Mary.) The term "Altar" was removed from the service, in favour of the word "table". The Gloria was moved to the end of the rite. However, the order of service remained largely unchanged. The sermon was still followed by the intercessions, confession, absolution and the prayer of humble access.

The 1662 BCP restored a variation of the black rubric. (While the rubric didn't deny "the real and essential presence" of our Lord, it did deny the "corporal presence of Christ's natural flesh and blood".) Changes to this prayer book were most obvious in the rubrics (bread and wine to be presented at the offertory, the Eucharist is described as the prayer of consecration and the practice of breaking the bread was restored).

The 1549 BCP, drafted by Cranmer, sees the introduction of a 'reformed catholic rite', influenced by early church fathers, Eastern Latin liturgies, the Roman rite (Sarum rite) and certain German church rites. (The daily office was also firmly grounded in the reading of scripture.) In the 1552 BCP, the prayers and rubrics develop a strong protestant emphasis. Through the introduction of the Black Rubric and use of the term "table" in place of "Altar", we see a theology that favours the continental reformers emphasis on remembering Christ, which resulted in a movement away from traditional references to the real presence of Christ. And, of course, in the 1662 BCP we see a softening of this position, through the addition of rubrics that seem to re-affirm the real presence of our Lord, though not in the corporal presence of flesh and blood.

Through the formation and editing of the early prayer books in the 16<sup>th</sup> and 17<sup>th</sup> centuries (and in our modern Australian editions - 1978 and 1995), we can acknowledge incredible scope within our Anglican liturgy (both Catholic and protestant), expressed within a consistent format – a format that we still use today. It is my belief that traditional liturgy can be expressed in new ways, while retaining the orthodox teaching of our tradition, within the general framework that is already in place. (After all, presenting liturgy in the vernacular is a well-established practice.)

Over the coming weeks, it might be interesting to explore this possibility together.

Rev Chris.