

CHAPTER 1

Liturgy

"Do this to remember me"

Liturgy is action. Jesus said "Do this to remember me," not "read pages 456 to 473 to remember me"! The word "liturgy" means "work," "work of the people." And it is work *of* the people, not *for* the people (which is the distinction between liturgy and magic). Liturgy is something we do *together* (the Greek "Do" in "Do this to remember me," is plural).

We have inherited a tendency to think of worship as primarily the words, and much of our energy in liturgical revision has focused on getting the words right. Words are powerful, and using them carefully is important, but the Anglican tradition has always seen there is more to worship than words. Processions, vesture, banners, music and singing, bread and wine, architecture, colour, flowers, incense, candles, and gestures, are but some of the elements of Anglican worship.

The non-verbal has, in the past, usually been thought of as enhancing and interpreting the words. This approach is being turned upside down. Actions and symbols are returning to their central position in worship. Actions, gestures, signs, and symbols, do not interpret the words. It is the words which interpret the actions. Liturgy is action.

Furthermore, ornaments and gestures, which were once appropriate when the priest had his back to the congregation or which were required by *The Book of Common Prayer* often need to be re-examined. The bread, for example, is not broken during the account of the last supper. (Cranmer had the breaking of the bread, where all Christian history had had it, after the prayer of consecration. It was moved in 1662 after the discontinuity of the Commonwealth).

Services in *The Book of Common Prayer* have often been likened to "meals on wheels." They were centrally prepared, and then warmed

and dished up locally. One began at the beginning of the service, reading most of it until one reached the end of it. Services in *A New Zealand Prayer Book* are more like "frozen peas," or maybe a basket of groceries and a recipe book. A core of essential material is provided with some further resources, other content is added locally. Many will be surprised that the obligatory material from any of the eucharistic liturgies (pages 404-510) takes only about six minutes to recite. Most of the rest of the service is locally chosen. The quality of the meal is now much more dependent on the local "cook"!

An example at this point illustrates what happens when the old approach is used in leading a service from *A New Zealand Prayer Book*.

The priest comes in at the back of the church (call it St. Agatha). He welcomes the congregation, states that it is the Third Sunday in Advent, and gives the theme, he then announces the hymn and processes to the front. After the hymn he says "Our service today begins on page 404. I greet you formally in the words of the liturgy, Grace and peace to you from God ..." He uses all three greetings on page 404 (looking at the book rather than the congregation, and the people also respond looking at the book, rather than at him). He reads the Sentence of the Day. "The Collect for Purity," he announces, and all say it together, followed by "Glory to God in the highest" which is said. "Please kneel" is followed by the Summary of the Law, the Kyries (again said), all the material on pages 407 and 408, the Sentence is repeated. Then "The Collects for the Third Sunday in Advent," is announced, followed by the three collects from pages 552-553. They are read as given on those pages (without the endings provided on page 549) and after each collect, the priest says "Amen" after which some of the congregation say "Amen." "Please be seated" concludes the Gathering of the Community.

Contrast this with the same Sunday in St. Bruno. Since the beginning of Advent, parishioners have been encouraged to have simple household devotions around an Advent wreath. These devotions begin with one person saying "Grace and peace to you from God" to which the rest present respond, "God fill you with truth and joy." This response is

now well known.

The Eucharist at St. Bruno's begins when the presiding priest stands, faces the congregation and opens wide her arms and says, "In the name of Christ, we welcome you this Sunday in Advent. Grace and peace to you from God." After the people respond, three children come up from the congregation and each lights a candle on the large Advent wreath while all sing "O come, O come, Emmanuel" which has been chosen as the theme song for this Advent.

The congregation kneels and the priest says "God has promised forgiveness ..." (page 407). There is a significant silence. Many know the confession by heart. Some glance at the page number on the hymn-board or on the pew sheet. A visitor is helped by his neighbour to find the place in the Prayer Book. After the Absolution the priest says, "Let us pray in silence that we may be ready to witness to justice as John the Baptist was." After the silence, the priest prays the Collect, "God for whom we wait ..." (page 552). Week by week, she ends the Collect with words which conclude "... now and for ever" and the people join together with the "Amen." There is only ever one collect, so they know to sit for the readings after this.

There are several things that can be learnt by comparing these two imaginary situations. Worship leaders need to understand the structure of the service. The Eucharist is not a collection of unrelated verbal components. The parts of the liturgy are all inter-connected and the presider needs to convey this flow to the assembly. Familiarity with the liturgical structure helps prevent presiders from creating dams which stop the flow of the service.

When a community is comfortable with the structure, and sees the "slots" into which an assortment of elements can be inserted, they will worship with confidence even when the elements are varied. Familiarity with the services in *A New Zealand Prayer Book* involves worship leaders noting where the word "may" occurs. In our examples, page 405 to half way down page 407 is a collection of optional resources. It can all be omitted, or a choice can be made appropriate for the occasion,

liturgical season, musical resources, and so on. Initial fears by many that optional material would seldom be omitted have, unfortunately, often proved correct.

As well as noting where the word "may" appears, there are also the instructions to say "the following or other appropriate words" or "these or similar words." In comparison to services from *The Book of Common Prayer*, it will take more time to prepare for services using *A New Zealand Prayer Book*. With the latter one needs to begin from the structure and the actions. This skeleton structure is then "clothed" with suitable material from *A New Zealand Prayer Book*, and with hymns, prayers, readings, introductions, and so on.

Every day a feast is no feast

At St. Bruno they decided when they use "Glory to God in the highest" (being a hymn) they would always sing it. Following tradition, they never use it in Advent or Lent. They sing it at Christmas time, during the Easter season, and on some festivals. During Lent the Kyries are sung. At other times a hymn or Song of Praise (pages 35-103) is sung.

Different services, in this way, have different atmospheres. Lent feels different to Easter and so on. "If every day is celebrated the same, how will a day feel special?" asks the vicar. "At home we have wine with our meal on special days, and bring out the best china. On some other days we just eat around the kitchen table. Here we have processions for the great feasts, with banners and dance. At other times we keep the service austere, and this gives a good contrast."

At St. Bruno, for Eucharists without singing, one of the Additional Songs of Praise (pages 96-103), or Great and Wonderful (page 35), or You are Worthy (page 46), or one of the other Songs of Praise (pages 35-95) is often prayed together in the "slot" after the greeting. All remain standing for this.

Hiding behind liturgy

More can be learnt from the two services described above. Worship leaders may rightly fear merely "putting on a show." The priest at St. Agatha may feel liturgy is keeping the rules and reading the recipe. But liturgy is action. As with good drama there is "choreography" and a "script."

Care needs to be taken not to make a sharp division between "formal" and "informal" as if the material in *A New Zealand Prayer Book* is less "real" than words which are impromptu or written oneself. The impression can be given that the Prayer Book words are a barrier to communication. It can feel as if the presider peeps over or around a wall of these words and gestures at the congregation. Hence, whenever they are speaking to the congregation, ministers need to keep eye contact with the people. It is very counter-symbolic if the presider is looking at the book while saying, "The Lord be with you"! At St. Bruno the greetings are real greetings, the prayers real prayers.

Visitors

There are tensions in every worship service between a celebration which reflects the "otherness" of the faith and one which highlights an "incarnational" approach. The former will use gestures, responses, and signs familiar to and understood by the regular worshipper but often lost on a visitor. The latter will minimise any differences to secular society and provide constant guidance by page numbers and running commentary in the hope of making visitors feel welcome.

A clutter of esoteric signs, symbols, and distracting, idiosyncratic gestures will generally discourage rather than enhance good worship. The Christian community, however, is like a family. Like every family we have customs and traditions. A guest who eats at a family meal will feel welcomed and yet also be aware that this family has often met before, and enjoys meeting and eating together. Some things the family does will take time to understand. Some of the customs will take time to

learn. Similarly, members of the Christian community make visitors feel welcome, and can assist them finding their place in the Prayer Book. Page numbers, like hymn numbers, may need to be announced (though both can be put up on boards, and on pew sheets). A feeling of belonging is unlikely to develop if each week announcements are made as if this is the first time we have met together. We should welcome visitors; but it is a sad community in which we are all constantly made to feel like visitors!

Liturgy as play

As a community risks putting the books down and responding from memory, there will be mistakes. People will respond at the "wrong" time, and with the "wrong" response. Here the drama metaphor has to stop. We are not putting on a perfect production. We are gathering to meet with one another and with God. Liturgy is also the children of God "playing." There will rightly be laughter and humour (my favourite response to "The Lord be with you" has been "What page are we on?") And there will be "mistakes." Liturgy ought to mirror life. No, even more strongly, liturgy ought to mould life. As children we play at what may one day become a reality.

Silence

Worship is not just words and actions and symbols, it is also silence. In silence we call to mind our sins. Silence may precede the Collect and follow each reading. A time of silent reflection appropriately follows the Sermon. Periods of silence may be kept in the Prayers of the People. The holy table may be prepared in silence, or silence may precede or follow the Great Thanksgiving. The bread is broken in silence. After communion there may be silence. Communities may need to be taught to use silence, and silences may have to be introduced gradually, and lengthened week by week. A worship leader unaccustomed to silence

may need to time the silences as at first they will appear much longer than they actually are.

Themes

The Eucharist is a thanksgiving for creation and redemption. That is the primary theme and anything "more" is icing on the cake. Human celebrations are normally of events rather than abstract concepts. Similarly, the scriptures tell the story of a God who acts (action again) and through our remembering and thanksgiving we are renewed to act in response. A theme may be one attempt to summarise briefly a message in the readings within the context of this present gathering. Preoccupation with finding a theme for each service, however, may limit the impact of a service. Community worship is like a lake upon which liturgy can cast a number of stones, each sending out its pattern of ripples. One person (a new Christian) may connect with the opening hymn, another (a person who has worshipped since her youth) with the Collect, another (just unemployed) with the first reading, another (coming to church for the first time since her husband died) with the Psalm, and so on.

Often the feast or liturgical season provides "theme" enough. Advent prepares for Christ's coming. Christmas celebrates Christ's birth. Like a particular type of restaurant (Mexican, Chinese, Indian,...), such a "theme" provides the mood in which the meal is enjoyed rather than a straight-jacket for the service.

Some Questions

In this chapter the author lays down some key points of view that will shape the rest of the book. As you identify these it would be helpful to clarify your own position in relation to each and your reason for that point of view. As you proceed through the book it will be helpful to notice where you find these fundamental points of view underlying the

materal.

The metaphors of "meals on wheels" and "a basket of groceries and a recipe book" are used by the author to illustrate change in the approach of A New Zealand Prayer Book, do these metaphors describe your experience and are there others that occur to you?

What are your responses to reading the description of St Bruno and St Agatha? Are there alternative pictures that you can imagine as helpful in comparing different styles of worship? Are there insights that come from the comparisons?

*In the section **Visitors** the author presents a clear point of view about announcing of page numbers and attitude to visitors. What is your response to these views? Do your views differ, if so, why?*