

**ANGLICAN WORSHIP
THE BOOK OF COMMON PRAYER
LITURGY AND PIETY**

I. Gathering

Hymns

- King of glory king of peace, *The Hymnal 1982*, #382
- O worship the king, *The Hymnal 1982*, #388

Collect for the Day

O Almighty God, who pours out on all who desire it the spirit of grace and of supplication: Deliver us, when we draw near to you, from coldness of heart and wanderings of mind, that with steadfast thoughts and kindled affections we may worship you in spirit and in truth; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

II. Illumination

Worship is central to the life of the Episcopal Church and Anglican tradition. An experience of Anglican worship is what initially draws many people into the fellowship of this Church. As we shall see, from the beginnings of the Church in England as a distinctive ecclesiastical body, it was the activity of worship that united various beliefs into one Church. In large part worship still identifies who we are more than any other factor.

The Anglican tradition is not confessional. That is, we have no official systematic theology or officially defined set of beliefs other than those expressed in the Book of Common Prayer, which we voice through our common worship. For instance, one can say that Anglicans believe in one God who is a Trinity of persons not because we have an academic statement that says so but rather because when we worship we profess the Nicene or Apostles' Creed, both of which witness to the Holy Trinity. In another instance, we believe in the Real Presence of Christ in the Eucharist and regard as mystery how that is accomplished beyond what is indicated by Eucharistic prayers. Our beliefs are given voice by the content of our worship, which continues to re-enforce our beliefs. None of this is to say that all Anglicans have always worshipped in the same way any more than Anglicans have always believed exactly in the same way.

Worship in the Anglican tradition is grounded in the use of *The Book of Common Prayer* in its various national editions. The first English *Book of Common Prayer* was published in 1549. Its content was a mixture of ancient materials and the theological thoughts of that day and place. Its real genius was that it provided a common English text so that priest and people could both take an active role in the worship of the Church. The prayer of the Church was in common, including all persons. From the beginning, uniformity in thought and practice has been less a part of who we are than has been a high respect and tolerance for divergent views and beliefs. Subsequent editions of *The Book of Common Prayer* improved on that beginning. Some editions leaned more toward traditional Catholic doctrines; sometimes the movement was toward principles of the Reformation Churches. The intent of all of the books was simply to have the people of England, regardless of their individual religious persuasions, worship together as one people in one Church.

As the British colonial empire spread across the globe so did the Church of England. With the Church went *The Book of Common Prayer*. And while they were rooted in their mother Church's *Book of Common Prayer*, each daughter Church developed her own unique version of the prayer book. In the modern era various national editions of *The Book of Common Prayer* and even subsequent editions of each individual Church's prayer book can contain slight differences or shades of theology. From a historical perspective this is because some national

Churches were founded by more Catholic minded missionaries, some by more Evangelical minded missionaries. Then, too, the Church does not live away from the world. The Church is naturally influenced by the culture in which she lives. That can have an effect, for instance, on whether or not the prayer book of any one national Church accepts or does not accept the ordination of women to the priesthood and episcopacy. Prayer Books historically have reflected such diverse perspectives.

So, then, the history of worship in the Anglican tradition has been grounded in a common source of prayer for the Church (the prayer book) and has used the activity of worship to gather up and hold together a wide variety of beliefs and practices.

The diversity of Anglican worship is experienced in many ways. The style of our worship can embrace the elaborate ceremonial of the Anglo-Catholic or “High Church” tradition or the elegant reserve of the Evangelical tradition, which is often referred to as “Low Church.” It can also reflect the enthusiastic energy of the Charismatic movement. Most often worship in the local parish tends to be a mixture of all of these.

Despite our English roots, worship of the Anglican Church in this day and age is done in many languages, including Spanish, French, Maori, Creole, African dialects, Portuguese, Japanese, Lakota Sioux, and Arabic to name a few. The Anglican Communion is a world-wide entity and our worship reflects that in musical styles, styles of liturgical vesture, and cultural accoutrements. The foundations though remain the same.

The roots of our worship drink from the ancient traditions of Celtic spirituality, with its appreciation for the Divine witness in the created world. Our system of daily devotions at morning, noon, evening, and night stems from the venerable Benedictine monastic tradition. Our liturgies, the set forms of our worship, draw from the ancient traditions of the undivided Church catholic as well as from Reformation principles. We value the presence of the Scriptures in all of our worship.

The essence of our liturgies is an encounter with the living God, during which we acknowledge and give thanks for all that God has done for us and seek God’s strengthening grace to continue in the holy fellowship of the Church and draw others into the community of faith. This sentiment is expressed very eloquently in what for many is a favorite prayer from the prayer book. In the General Thanksgiving we pray:

Almighty God, Father of all mercies, we your unworthy servants give you humble thanks for all your goodness and loving-kindness to us and to all whom you have made. We bless you for our creation, preservation and all the blessings of this life; but above all for your immeasurable love in the redemption of the world by our Lord Jesus Christ; for the means of grace, and for the hope of glory. And, we pray, give us such an awareness of your mercies, that with truly thankful hearts we may show forth your praise, not only with our lips, but in our lives, by giving up our selves to your service, and by walking before you in holiness and righteousness all our days; through Jesus Christ our Lord, to whom with you and the Holy Spirit, be honor and glory throughout all ages.

In worship we encounter the God of our salvation through the Scriptures that are read and shared. In worship we remember Christ’s sacrifice on the cross for the reconciliation of the world and celebrate the gift of grace. Through sacramental acts such as Baptism and the Holy Eucharist, we are drawn into the Divine life of the Body of Christ which is the Church.

The Anglican tradition is deeply incarnational, that is to say we believe that by the Incarnation of Christ, all of our lives are blessed. Our physical selves, as well as our spiritual selves, are participants in the salvation Christ offers, and both to be open to God’s activity.

In worship, the times and seasons of all our lives are brought into the presence of God and Christ’s Church. The church calendar divides the year into seasons and days of special commemoration. Advent draws us into the mystery of the first and next coming of Christ into this world. Lent helps us to participate in the suffering and

passion of Christ. Easter lifts us to celebrate God's re-creation of the world through the death and resurrection of Christ. Days which commemorate events in the life of Christ and the Church, such as Pentecost, the Ascension, and the Epiphany of Our Lord, help us to grasp the fullness of the story of our faith. Saints' days and special commemorations give us concrete examples of lives lived in faithfulness to God and instill in us the hope that we, too, can live faithfully and even valiantly for Christ. Scripture lessons, prayers, and brief readings for every official commemoration are found in a book entitled *Lesser Feasts and Fasts*.

In the corporate worship of the rites of Marriage, Ordination, Setting Apart of Monastic Vocation, Laying on of Hands for Healing, Confirmation, Burial, Thanksgiving for the Birth or Adoption of a Child, we acknowledge that all of our life and all parts of our lives belong to God.

We also worship incarnationally. Our worship provides our bodies as well as our minds with the opportunity to be engaged in worship. We stand, sit, and kneel. We sometimes bow or genuflect. We may use the sign of the Cross. Our worship spaces are often beautifully adorned with fabrics and candles. Our ears and voices are engaged in worship by all kinds of music. In the laying on of hands or the washing of feet, the sense of touch conveys the grace of God. We can even use the sense of smell in worship by the use of incense or oil of chrism, or candle wax.

For the Anglican tradition, the whole world is part of God's holy creation. Our worship includes provisions for the Blessing of Homes, the Blessing of Fields, as well as the blessing of articles created to enhance the beauty of holiness in worship. Near the calendar date for the commemoration of St. Francis, it is not uncommon to find a service for the Blessing of Animals. Many of these services are found in a companion book to *The Book of Common Prayer* called *The Book of Occasional Services*.

In worship we assemble as the whole people of God. Young, old, rich, poor, male, female, lay, and clergy, all are made one by the spirit of the Risen Christ and all worship together. We are united by worship with the Church Universal as well, as our prayers and praises are joined with the prayers and praises of those who have gone before us in the faith, all those who will come after us, and with the angels whose delight it is always to worship God. We sing with them one hymn of praise.

This brings us to the role of music in our liturgy. *The Book of Common Prayer* instructs that anything that may be said in the liturgy may be sung (BCP p. 14). *The Book of Common Prayer* also points to the importance of the texts of hymns and anthems in our worship. Remembering that our theology is expressed primarily through worship, it makes sense that we do not allow just anything to be sung or said during worship. As *The Book of Common Prayer* instructs, "Hymns referred to in the rubrics of this Book are to be understood as those authorized by this Church. The words of anthems are to be from Holy Scripture, or from this Book, or from texts congruent with them" (BCP p. 14). Music, especially hymns, is how the theology of our tradition is made clear and immediate to the people. They have been called "the theological texts of the people." Care should be taken then that hymns and songs are never present just because we like to sing them, but because they serve to draw out the meaning of the scripture texts or commemorations of the day or to give us words to respond to them. By Canon Law the ultimate responsibility for the content and conduct of the worship of the parish Church rests exclusively with the Rector or Priest in Charge. Even then he or she is not free to make innovations or changes to the Church's liturgical forms. Canon Law requires that they must conform to the rubrics (instructions) of *The Book of Common Prayer*. By having this requirement, the Church safeguards the people from the whims and personal convictions of individual members of the clergy and insures that the breadth of our tradition is maintained from the largest cathedral to the smallest mission.

The worship of the Anglican tradition is obviously corporate and public but it is also private. We hesitate to divide one from the other because they are necessary to each other. Each Anglican is encouraged to have a

personal discipline of prayer and study called a Rule of Life. Here, too, *The Book of Common Prayer* is our guide. Author Martin Thornton has written:

*To the seventeenth-century layman the Prayer Book was not a shiny volume to be borrowed from the shelf on entering the church and carefully replaced on leaving. It was a beloved and battered personal possession, a lifelong companion and guide, to be carried from church to kitchen, to living room, to bedside table.*¹

The prayer book provides the guides for a detailed and systematic reading of Scripture in the Daily Office lectionary as well as the three year cycle of weekly readings for the Sunday Eucharist. It also provides numerous forms for devotions for families and individuals. It contains the Psalms which are some of the best devotional reading Christians can have. *The Book of Common Prayer* is to be used at home as well as in the Church.

The Book of Common Prayer, as important as it is to our tradition, is not the limit of our lives of prayer and devotion. From the foundation of corporate prayer and liturgy, Anglicans worldwide have always valued their own traditions of individual piety. Many Episcopalians pray the Rosary in either its traditional Marian form or in the newer tradition of Anglican Prayer Beads. Silent contemplative prayer, the use of *lectio divina* (contemplative reading of Scriptures and other sacred texts), walking the labyrinth, speaking in tongues, praying in the Spirit, pilgrimages, retreats, silent days, all have a place in our tradition. All have proved helpful as individuals work toward deepening their spiritual lives.

The Church's calendar of seasons, feasts, and commemorations can also be brought closer to the heart by observing religious traditions and customs in the home, thus making each home a chapel. This is especially helpful when there are young children in the home as it helps them understand that home is as much a part of religious life as is the church building. Examples of these home based liturgies might include using an Advent wreath, setting out cookies for St. Nicholas (on December 6th), flying a kite on the Feast of the Ascension, or celebrating each person's baptismal birthday with a cake and small religiously themed presents.[2] The limits to what we do and find helpful to us spiritually are bounded only by our imaginations and our willingness to experience new avenues of spiritual refreshment.

Worship in the Anglican tradition is comprehensive, that is to say that it encompasses many things. It can contain the Catholic tradition as well as the Evangelical. It is private and corporate. It is as unique as each worshipper and at the same time as universal as Christ's One, Holy, Catholic, and Apostolic Church. It is grounded in the traditions of *The Book of Common Prayer* and grows from there. It is found in the meeting of the Church for the weekly Sunday celebration of the Resurrection and in the home liturgies that call God's presence into every moment of every day.

Our worship is made particular by the traditions of each local parish and at the same time witnesses to the universal Gospel of the Risen Christ. Worship is what tells others who we are. It is also how we tell ourselves and those who come into our community who we are and what we believe. We are, in the major part, defined by our worship and liturgy, as we have always been, and as we always shall be.