
IS THIS YOUR FIRST TIME IN A LITURGICAL SERVICE?

Following the Liturgy: A Guide

Liturgy is Work

One misconception about liturgy is that it is a mindless reciting of stuff - putting the mind on hold and letting the mouth run. The word *liturgy* comes from a Greek word meaning both "form" and "work of the people." We approach our liturgical service as something that involves everyone, not just a few knowledgeable souls. We welcome your participation.

The Act of Worship

Our worship is active and congregational. Our parishes use the *Book of Common Prayer*, which enables the parish to fully share and participate in each service.

A simple rule in our liturgical service is: You **stand** to sing. You **stand** to affirm your faith (the Apostles' and Nicene Creeds), and you **stand** to be exhorted (when you hear the words "Dearly beloved...").

We **sit** to hear instruction. So, we **sit** during the Lessons from the Bible, and also during the Homily or Sermon.

We **kneel** when praying as a sign of both humility and thanksgiving in speaking to the King, our Father.

Some people have physical difficulties kneeling, and they should be comfortable sitting, though we ask that they sit forward allowing for those kneeling behind them.

The procession at the beginning of the service is symbolic of our entrance into God's throne-room. Our model is heaven, and the worship service going on there right now.

You will see some bow as the cross passes by. This and other liturgical gestures are not mandatory, but serve to remind the worshiper of their respect for the symbol of their faith.

The Language of Worship

You will find the language of the Prayer Book to be formal, perhaps antiquated. It was done so with a purpose, and was antiquated in some ways when it was first published in 1549. The language is formal because we understand worship as being taken up into the throne-room of God, and presenting ourselves to Him.

If you were ushered into the Oval Office of the White House, chances are your language would be a lot more formal than everyday speech. You would probably even practice your comments in front of a mirror, no matter who occupies the presidency.

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It takes time and practice to feel comfortable with the service. All of us around you went through the same process. Please don't let the unfamiliar discourage your involvement.

There are words no longer in regular use that appear in our Prayer Book. So that everyone can comfortably understand we offer this short list...

vouchsafe graciously grant
unfeignedly sincerely, genuinely
sundry various, numerous
dissemble hide, a false appearance
oblation offering, sacrifice
inestimable beyond measure

Other Helps for the Service

We are interested in you and your participation with us in worship. To that end, here are a few helps...

- Pray in a manner comfortable to you. Some people are most comfortable closing their eyes to pray. That is OK; you need not keep your eyes open just because the prayers are written.
- Spend some time becoming familiar with the prayers and confessions of the Prayer Book. The more you grasp the words, the more free you are from distraction. Questions about the content of the prayers are good and important, and should be answered. This is a case where familiarity will breed appreciation and comfort.
- Also, try to learn some of the rich, devout history of liturgical worship - from the times of ancient Israel through the Apostolic Church, to St. Augustine, Martin Luther, John Calvin, and Thomas Cranmer, to modern-day figures like C.S. Lewis, Joni Eareckson Tada, to J.I. Packer and Alister McGrath.
- Know that the liturgy can stand by itself, and is at least as important as the sermon. Due to these godly prayers, hymns, and the spoken Word, one has the liberty to come to worship in spirit and truth every time, even if the sermon is not considered "the best" to one person or another.
- Regarding the collective recitation of the Psalms, confessions, and Creeds, consider them as a type of music offered to God. We speak the words in unison when we sing our hymns to God; it need not be any less meaningful or devout to jointly

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address the Holy Trinity without background instrumental music.

- Likewise, know that worship is meant to be participatory and not entertainment. This is our opportunity to ascribe to God the glory due his Name. We do not accomplish this as individuals but as a body, an organic whole, joining with Christians all over the world, and those in heaven from all of history, along with the angels and archangels.
- Also, know that the Prayer Book is meant to help maximize both the breadth and depth of biblical worship. It is not to be confused with Holy Scripture, or seen as a substitute for it. It is, however, a means of organizing worship around as much Scripture as possible. Fully 80% of the Prayer Book is either drawn directly from the Bible, or a clear allusion to it. Few traditions offer such a persuasive and extensive presence of the Bible throughout their public worship.

"The advantage of a fixed form of service is that we know what is coming. *Ex tempore* public prayer has this difficulty; we don't know whether we can mentally join in it until we've heard it - it might be phony or heretical. We are therefore called upon to carry on a *critical* and *devotional* activity at the same moment: two things hardly compatible. In a fixed form we ought to have 'gone through the motions' before in our private prayers; the rigid forms really set our devotions free. I also find the more rigid it is, the easier it is to keep one's thoughts from straying. Also, it prevents getting too completely eaten up by whatever happens to be the preoccupation of the moment (i.e., war, an election, or what not). The permanent shape of Christianity shows through. I don't see how the *ex tempore* method can help becoming provincial, and I think it has a great tendency to direct attention to the minister rather than to God."

- C.S. Lewis, *Letters*, 1 April 1952