

The Liturgy Of The Word.

Text: Luke 10:16

Suggested Hymns:

503, 259, 500, 285, 265

- 1) The proclamation of the Word
- 2) The Introit
- 3) The Gloria Patri
- 4) The Gloria in excelsis
- 5) The Salutation
- 6) The Collect
- 7) The Scripture Lessons
- 8) The Creed
- 9) The hymn before the sermon
- 10) The Sermon
- 11) The hymn after the sermon and the Offertory
- 12) The General Prayer

The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit, be with you all. Amen.

The text for our sermon today is Luke 10:16, ¹⁶ *“He who hears you hears Me, he who rejects you rejects Me, and he who rejects Me rejects Him who sent Me.”* (NKJV)

Lord God, heavenly Father, sanctify us through Your truth. Your Word is truth. Amen.

Dear friends in Christ,

In our worship service we join with all the angels of God and all creatures in heaven and earth to give *“Blessing and honor and glory and power Be to Him who sits on the throne, And to the Lamb, forever and ever!”*¹ And this worship, as set out in our liturgy consists of three parts: the **Preparation** which corresponds to the porch through which we enter into the church building, the **Liturgy of the Word** which corresponds to the nave of the church building where we sit, and the **Liturgy of the Sacrament** which corresponds to the chancel where we commune at the Lord’s table.

Today we shall consider the second part of this service in which Christ comes to address us in His Word, which includes the reading of the Scripture lessons and the proclamation of the Word in the sermon. May the Lord bless our meditation.

1. The Proclamation Of The Word

Some people might be inclined to think, if the proclamation of the Word is all that happens in this section, then it should be quite simple. The pastor, or someone else, can simply get up and read the Scripture lessons and preach a sermon, and that is it. But there are a whole lot of other things in the liturgy that precede and follow the proclamation of the Word. What is the point of all that?

If your close friend with whom you associate every day wanted to tell you something, he or she would just say it, and that would be all. It would be over and done with. But the Church has never looked upon her Lord and God as we might look upon some friend or buddy that we hang around with.

On the contrary she looks upon Christ, in however humble form He might come to us, as her Lord and God, her eternal, almighty Creator and King who is at all times to be regarded with the highest respect and reverence.

Just as no one would expect to approach the queen by simply stumbling into her presence and blurting out in some direct conversation, so likewise the Church does not deal with her eternal Lord and Creator in that way either.

There are certain preliminaries that are demanded by true honour and respect. There is a right and proper way formally to approach such a mighty Lord and Creator. And this is the reason for the liturgy that proceeds the Word of Christ through which He speaks to each and everyone of us.

2. Introit

After having received the absolution or assurance of God's grace and forgiveness announced by the pastor to enable us to stand before God with peace and confidence the worship proper begins with the *INTROIT*. This is a Latin word which simply means "he enters." It was originally a psalm that was sung by the choir as the clergy entered the church. You see, originally the service began at this point.

The preparation for the service took place in a special preliminary service before the worship began. And so, as the congregation which had assembled in the church, awaited the entrance of the ministers, the choir and sometimes a double choir would sing a psalm which set the mood and the theme of the worship for the day.

In those early days in the fourth and fifth centuries, the churches were built with the vestry at the entrance to the church alongside what we call the porch, and so the choir had time to sing a whole psalm as the officiating ministers left the vestry and proceeded up the aisle to the front of the church.

Later on when churches were built with the vestry at the front of the church there was no time for the choir to sing a whole psalm as the clergy entered the church, and so it was shortened into only a few verses of the psalm – verses that contained the chief thought.

And today when many of our churches no longer have choirs, or when the choir sings only on certain occasions, the pastor himself sings or speaks the introit.

That is all that is left of the glorious psalm in our liturgy today. But if we remember that the psalms were the hymns of the Old Testament church and the early New Testament church – spanning thousands of years – hymns which David and Isaiah, Christ and His apostles, the saints and martyrs of the early church sang, we may perhaps feel a little sorry that this glorious link with the saints of the past ages has been reduced in our worship to a couple of verses sung or spoken by the pastor.

Incidentally there are a number of psalms included in the hymn book (from 648 to 730) which are very sacred and appropriate for our worship when sung properly.

3. The Gloria Patri

Nearly all of these psalms are followed by the *GLORIA PATRI*, that is the words “*Glory to the Father, and the Son, and the Holy Spirit, as it was in the beginning, is now, and shall be forevermore. Amen.*” This is simply a little hymn of adoration to the Trinity that emphasises the fact that even the Old Testament hymns give glory to Christ and the entire Trinity, even though the Old Testament saints did not have this full revelation as yet.

Next comes the *KYRIE*, which is simply a Greek word meaning “O Lord.” Incidentally these Greek and Latin terms and titles are retained in our modern church service in order to remind us of our link with the ancient Christian Church of Greek and Roman times.

Our Order of Service is not simply something dreamed up recently by some committee in the church but it is our heritage which has come down to us from the ancient church and used by faithful children of God for hundreds and thousands of years. This ought to remind us of the fact that in our worship we do in fact join with the saints of all ages to give glory and honour to our Lord and Creator, often using the very forms that they used centuries ago.

Now the *KYRIE*, “*Lord have mercy, Christ have mercy, Lord have mercy,*” is often misunderstood because on the surface it sounds to us like a plea to God for mercy and forgiveness. But that is not the way it is meant in our liturgy at all. God’s mercy and forgiveness were already announced and proclaimed in the absolution earlier in the preparation.

Rather, these words are intended as an acclamation of praise to God and a reminder of His mercy through which alone we dare to approach Him. We are saying to God, as it were, “You are the Lord, the source of all mercy; Christ, in you we have mercy, Lord remember your mercy as we come before you now.”

We are probably not used to talking like this. We usually say things straight out just as we mean them. That is why we would hardly know how to address the queen if we were called into her presence. There are even set forms with which to address a petition to the Governor General or parliament of the country, which may sound very strange to us because we do not normally speak that way.

And yet we all realise that it would be rude to talk to those dignitaries in the way we talk to our classmate or neighbour. But if there is a special and appropriate way in which to address such dignitaries how much more we would expect this to be so in addressing our infinite Creator and Lord as we come before Him in formal worship.

The formal address used here in the ancient *KYRIE* was that of the church for many hundreds of years. *Kyrie eleison*, as they used to say it in Greek. That is “*Lord have mercy, Christ have mercy, Lord have mercy.*”

4. The Gloria In Excelsis

The *KYRIE* is followed at once by the *GLORIA IN EXCELSIS* which simply means “glory in the highest degree” and is a hymn of the highest praise and adoration addressed to the Triune God.

Here we consciously join with the angels and all the hosts of heaven to praise and honour God. In fact the first part of the GLORIA is that majestic hymn sung by the angels to the shepherds at the first coming of Christ. And then it goes on in the words of the early church to give praise and adoration to the Triune God.

The whole thing is intended as a triumphant outburst of worshipful praise and adoration to God as it says, "*Glory to God in the highest.*" Surely this is a most fitting way for a congregation of believers to extol their Lord as He is about to reveal Himself and speak to them in His Word.

5. The Salutation

But before this happens the pastor and people, mindful of the gravity of what is about to happen, that God Himself will speak to them now, exchange a biblical greeting. The pastor says, or chants "*The Lord be with you.*" In other words, through what is about to happen, he wants the congregation to know and experience the true presence of the Lord in their midst, and to this the congregation responds, "*And with your spirit.*"

In other words, realising that it is the pastor's responsibility to become the mouthpiece of God for them, they, as it were, commission him anew for this task by invoking God's presence to guide and direct his spirit so that he might fulfil this responsibility as God would have him do.

6. The Collect

The *COLLECT*, which precedes the Scripture readings, is simply a short prayer. Most of these have been used by the faithful children of God for fifteen centuries. They change from Sunday to Sunday according to the church year and often have some reference to the Gospel lesson for the day. (A *COLLECT* is really a special form of prayer with five parts: the invocation, the reason or basis for the petition, the petition itself, the purpose, and the ending.)

7. The Scripture Lessons

Then, as the high point of this part of the service comes the *SCRIPTURE LESSONS* in which the Lord Himself speaks to His faithful people in and through His Word as it is read by the pastor, just as Jesus said long ago, "*He who hears you hears Me, he who rejects you rejects Me, and he who rejects Me rejects Him who sent Me.*"

In other words we must know that when the pastor reads or preaches the Word of God, then this is not the pastor's word, but the very word and voice of God Himself that addresses them. To despise that proclamation of God's Word is not simply to despise the pastor but to despise Christ the Lord Himself.

And so the congregation must take this most seriously. Although their natural eyes and ears may not be able to appreciate it, yet in faith they know and understand that Christ Himself is present to address them.

The early church, at first, had only the Old Testament lessons from the law and the prophets, but after the New Testament was written by inspiration of God the Epistles were read as well, and later the Gospels too.

Eventually there was a special lesson chosen for each Sunday of the year in such a way that all the main truths of the Christian faith were presented during the year. Of course, there were at first other readings as well from the Scriptures that could be chosen at will, but always the Epistle and Gospel Lesson for the day were read.

The congregation responds to the Epistle Lesson with a threefold "*Hallelujah*," which is simply an expression of joy and praise to God. When the Gospel lesson is introduced the congregation chants, "*Glory be to Thee O God.*", and at the conclusion of the Gospel lesson they respond, "*Praise be to Thee O Christ.*" Note that the congregation here addresses Christ directly realising that He is truly present among them and has spoken to them.

8. The Creed

Having heard the Word of the Lord spoken to them through His servant, the people of God who receive that Word with believing hearts are strengthened in their faith and assurance of salvation, and so they give expression to that faith in the words of the Creed.

The Apostles' Creed was simply a brief statement of the teaching of the apostles summarising the Christian faith. The Nicene Creed was adopted by the Christian church at the Council of Nicea in 325 A.D., specifically reaffirming the deity of Christ which was denied by the Arians at that time.

The Creed should not be regarded as a prayer, but rather as the congregation's profession of faith, both positively confessing the truth and

negatively rejecting every opposing error, and therefore it ought to be recited with boldness and conviction.

It contains all the fundamental beliefs of the Christian faith in simple statements and is a testimony to the unity of faith which binds together the true children of God of all ages and nations.

9. The Hymn Before The Sermon

The *HYMN* that follows the Creed is one of the chief hymns of the service and is intended to fit the sermon for the day and should be chosen for that purpose.

10. The Sermon

The *SERMON* that follows is again the proclamation of the Word of God even though it is prepared and preached by the pastor as the Lord said, *“He who hears you hears Me.”* It is for this reason, of course, that the sermon must be in full accord with the Word and truth of God.

No pastor dare simply preach his own ideas as though they were the Word of Christ. Of course the sermon is not to be simply a stringing together of Scripture texts either, but is to be an application of the truths and teachings of Scripture to our present day life and circumstances.

It must not shrink from declaring the whole counsel of God, neither adding anything nor detracting anything from it at all. The Law must be preached in all its sternness and severity, and the Gospel in all its sweetness. Someone has expressed it this way; the pastor must afflict the comfortable and comfort the afflicted.

Only in as much as he does this faithfully do the words of Jesus apply, *“He who hears you hears Me, he who rejects you rejects Me, and he who rejects Me rejects Him who sent Me.”* And this implies that when God’s Word is preached in this way then the congregation is to heed and obey this Word as they would heed and obey Christ Himself.

11. The Hymn After The Sermon And The Offertory

The sermon is followed by the congregation’s response in the *HYMN* and the *OFFERING*. The Offering, of course, is not to be seen as any kind of sacrifice for sin or payment for the Word of Christ, but rather as a thank offering to God.

In this way the congregation responsibly participates in the continued proclamation of the Word of Christ by supporting this work of the church and its mission to the world, financially. The motive for this giving is thankful appreciation for all that the Lord has done for us – for our very life and welfare, as well as the blessing of salvation through Christ our Lord.

That is why the gifts are brought to the altar. They are not simply to pay our share in the running of the church, but they are our thank-offering to God, and are therefore brought to Him, as it were, by placing them upon the altar during the singing of the *OFFERTORY*.

12. The General Prayer

This is followed by the *GENERAL PRAYER* in which the Church prays for the true needs and welfare of the whole Church of God and the community in which she lives, both temporal and spiritual blessings.

Let us summarise. The heart and centre of this section of the service is the fact that Christ, the Lord of the Church, exalted at the right hand of the Father, with all power in heaven and earth, here comes to His Bride, the Church, to speak with her through the reading and preaching of His Word.

Although the congregation with their natural eyes and ears see only the form and hear only the voice of men, yet in faith their souls have heard and received the very Word and voice of Christ the heavenly Bridegroom Himself – the voice of Him who sits upon the throne and the Lamb.

Strengthened and sustained by this unique privilege of such close communion with their Lord they can go back into the world to do their work, yes even to fight their battles against the evils that surround them on all sides, assured of final relief and victory in the name of Christ their Lord.

When Christians see and appreciate their worship in this way they will look forward to such worship with eager longing, and return home with truly thankful hearts.

May God grant us all, the strength of faith and spiritual understanding thus to worship God and to cherish our meeting here with our heavenly Bridegroom who wants to bestow His love and blessing on His precious Bride, the Church. Amen.

The peace of God, which passes all understanding, will keep our hearts and minds, in Christ Jesus. Amen.

¹ Revelation 5:13