
THE BEAUTY OF OUR LITURGY

St. Benedict Orthodox Church
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WEEK I~ *Where Heaven and Earth Meet*

I. Moses' Ascent into the Dark Cloud

- What is the Mass? What is worship? What is it that we gather for on Sundays? What distinguishes this human work from everything else that humans do, and from everything else that happens in the Universe?
- The liturgy, like the dark cloud on the flaming mountain, is the place where we, the body of Christ, meet God and transform into His likeness

II. Cosmic, Sacrifice, Eschatological, Wedding

- "What believing soul can doubt that at the hour of the Sacrifice, upon the word of the priest, heaven opens, and that choirs of angels assist at this mystery of Jesus Christ, that here the highest is combined with the lowest, the earthly united with the heavenly, the visible and the invisible become one?" ~ *St. Gregory*

III. The Liturgy is Cosmic

- "Worship gives us a share in heaven's mode of existence, in the world of God, and allows light to fall from that divine world into ours." ~ *Ratzinger*
- Man cannot just 'make up' worship. He must be taught how to worship.
- All of creation is oriented in a direction. Our worship is the fulfillment of that direction.

IV. Human Worship is a Mirror of Heavenly Worship

- When God revealed Himself to Moses and the Israelites, He taught them how to worship properly – instructing them down to the slightest minutia – for the sake that our worship might align with heavenly worship – our mode of existence with the mode of existence in heaven – the ultimate purpose of all of creation.
- Our goal at church, here in Wichita Falls, is to align our worship as closely as we can to the heavenly worship – thus opening up the door for heaven to fill our lives.

V. The Liturgy is Sacrifice

- Sacrifice is not destruction. Sacrifice is union; the definition of love.
- The purpose of the universe is sacrifice.
- The mass is the most radical and complete act of sacrifice in the universe. It is the purpose of the universe – the union of man and creation with God.

VI. The Liturgy is Eschatological

- St. Gregory describes the Church as being in the “not yet” stage – that is, we are in the dawn, the sunrise, of the Second Coming.
- In the liturgy, we are entering into and experiencing now the age-to-come (Eschaton).
- “In its essence the Church is the presence, the actualization in this world of the ‘world to come,’ in this *aeon* – of the Kingdom. And the mode of this presence, of this actualization of the new life, the new *aeon*, is precisely the *leitourgia*. . . The *leitourgia*. . . is the action of the Church itself, of the Church *in actu*, it is the very expression of its life.” ~ *Schmemmann*
- “Whether it be the sacraments, or the liturgical year. . . or the week lived in remembrance of and in waiting for the Eighth Day, the Day of the Lord; it is always this eschatological reality, this foretaste, this anticipation of the Kingdom of God, which is offered to us by the liturgy.” ~ *Schmemmann*

VII. The Liturgy is the Wedding between God and Man

- In the first century, people used the word *apokalypsis* “to describe part of their week-long wedding festivities. The *apokalypsis* was the lifting of the veil of a virgin bride, which took place immediately before the marriage was consummated in sexual union.” ~ *K. Haun*
- The climax of the Apocalypse is the “marriage supper of the Lamb” (Rev. 19:9) ~ the final union between God and the Church.
- We already begin to experience this in the liturgy.

VIII. Becoming Human in the Liturgy

- The liturgy is cosmic, sacrifice, eschatological, and the divine wedding.
- The key to take out of this lesson is a little awe of what it is that we are engaging with, and our salvation really boils down to how we open our eyes to the liturgy and allow it to shape us.
- The way we enter into the liturgy depends on us, whether we prepare for the mass with prayer, fasting, and confession, and participate during the mass with prayer, reverence, and awe. If we open our hearts up to God in this way, then His grace will pour inside and change us.
- The Mass is the one place in our lives when we are closest to God and most fully alive – there is no greater adventure.