
THE BEAUTY OF OUR LITURGY

St. Benedict Orthodox Church
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WEEK III~ *Lex Orandi, Lex Credendi*

I. The Divine Oven

- “I pray that you, being rooted and established in love, may have power, together with all the saints, to grasp how wide and long and high and deep is the love of Christ, and to know this love that surpasses knowledge – that you may be filled to the measure of all the fullness of God) – Ephesians 3:17-19
- The Liturgy is the divine Oven
 - When we put raw dough into an oven it comes out as refined bread. In the same way, as we participate in the liturgy we become full and thriving human beings.

II. Does God really care?

- I have a dear Evangelical friend who once said: “God doesn’t care how we worship. He just cares where our heart is.” This sounds all very nice, but it’s actually extremely problematic.
- First, the Holy Scriptures and early Christian documents go into great detail about proper worship. Second, putting aside the spiritual side of this, and just looking at brain waves, we can see that certain human behaviors, specific music or atmospheres, shape the people that we are. Loud, raucous rock’n’roll changes the chemicals in our brains; in the same sense that peaceful, meditative music affects us.
- *A letter from Screwtape the demon*: “One of their poets, Coleridge, has recorded that he did not pray ‘with moving lips and bended knees’ but merely ‘composed his spirit to love’ and indulged ‘a sense of supplication’. *That is exactly the sort of prayer we want*; and since it bears a superficial resemblance to the prayer of silence as practised by those who are very far advanced in [God’s] service, clever and lazy patients can be taken in by it for quite a long time. At the very least, they can be persuaded that the bodily position makes no difference to their prayers; *for they constantly forget, what you must always remember, that they are animals and that whatever their bodies do affects their souls.*” (C. S. Lewis)

III. If worship shapes who we are, then we need God to teach it to us

- "Worship cannot come from our imagination: that would be a cry in the darkness or mere self-affirmation. True liturgy supposes that God responds and shows us how we can adore Him. The Church lives in His presence - and its reason for being and existing is to expand His presence in the world." ~ Ratzinger

IV. “Lex Orandi, Lex Credendi”

- “The Law of Prayer is the Law of belief”
 - i.e. ‘The way we worship is the way we believe.’
- The phrase is sometimes expanded to say: “Lex orandi, lex credendi, lex vivendi” ~ ‘The Way we worship is the way we believe – which is the way we live our lives.’”

V. The Singing Nightingale

- The liturgy is the breath of the Church. You can imagine a nightingale at the prime of its health. When the healthy nightingale sings she produces a beautiful melody. But now imagine a sick nightingale. The only sound that can come out of it will be a stagnant croak. Worship is breathed into being by the community worshipping. Thus, we must strive to follow the worship as it has been breathed by Orthodoxy.

VI. Experience first, beliefs second

- The apostles didn’t figure out the Christian life first, and then go meet Jesus. “Hello Rabbi, we want you to know that we’ve thought it over and figured out what it means to be a Christian, and so since you’re Christ, we’ve chosen to follow you.” This is lunacy. The apostles first encountered Jesus, and then the Christian life came afterwards. We first encounter God in worship, and everything else follows from there.

VII. The Liturgy makes us who we are

VIII. Two spirits: that of modernism and Vatican II & that of Orthodox Christianity

- Archbishop Annibale Bugnini (architect of the *Novus Ordo Missae*) believed that “the norm for the liturgy and for Church renewal is modern Western man, because he is the perfect man, and the final man, and the everlasting man, because he is the perfect and normative man. And he made clear that, for him, ‘acculturation’ or adapting to Western culture is the great work in Church liturgical reform and renewal, and in theology. . . . Secularization was, for him, a necessary process, something Church needed to accept and embrace.” (“The Bitter Struggle,” Robert Moynihan, *Inside the Vatican*, May, 1996).
- “Clearly, Bugnini’s desire to make the New Mass reflect the secularized ‘new man’ makes sense only if the old Mass (ie., the largely pre-schism Rite of the West), which was still in use until 1969, reflected and embodied not secularism *but the ancient and otherworldly orthodoxy of traditional Christianity.*” ~ Fr. John Connelli

IX. Basking in the Liturgy of the Apostles and Fathers of the Church

- What does all this mean to us practically?
- Quite simply, as Orthodox Christians, we have to do everything we can to:
 - Take our liturgy seriously
 - Carry out as fully as we can, the traditions handed down to us by the Apostles and Fathers of the Church.
 - Celebrate the Liturgy with as much beauty and grandeur possible
 - Allow the liturgy to wash over us and to reshape us into the image of God.