

BEYOND SMELLS & BELLS

THE WONDER AND POWER OF
CHRISTIAN LITURGY

MARK GALLI



PARACLETE PRESS
BREWSTER, MASSACHUSETTS

Beyond Smells and Bells: The Wonder and Power of Christian Liturgy

2008 First Printing

Copyright © 2008 by Mark Galli

ISBN: 978-1-55725-521-1

All biblical quotes are taken from The Holy Bible, English Standard Version copyright © 2001 by Crossway Bibles, a publishing ministry of Good News Publishers. Used by permission. All rights reserved.

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Galli, Mark.

Beyond smells and bells : the wonder and power of Christian liturgy /
by Mark Galli.

p. cm.

ISBN 978-1-55725-521-1

1. Liturgics. 2. Public worship. I. Title.

BV176.3.G35 2008

264--dc22

2008000737

10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1

All rights reserved. No portion of this book may be reproduced, stored in an electronic retrieval system, or transmitted in any form or by any means—electronic, mechanical, photocopying, recording, or any other—except for brief quotations in printed reviews, without the prior written permission of the publisher.

Published by Paraclete Press

Brewster, Massachusetts

www.paracletepress.com

Printed in the United States of America

FOR
THE REVEREND RAYMOND COLE
my first guide into the life of liturgy

CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION	9
CHAPTER 1	
LIVING THE OLD, OLD STORY	
<i>The Basic Outline of the Liturgy</i>	13
CHAPTER 2	
COSMIC DAYTIMER	
<i>How the Liturgical Calendar Can Bring Order to Our Lives</i>	20
CHAPTER 3	
LIFE TOGETHER	
<i>How the Liturgy Draws Us into Community</i>	28
CHAPTER 4	
THE INTIMATE OTHER	
<i>How the Liturgy Helps Us Meet a Holy and Loving God</i>	38
CHAPTER 5	
IF YOU DON'T GET IT, YOU'VE GOT IT	
<i>The Liturgy as a Mystery Full of Meaning</i>	47
CHAPTER 6	
A MORE REAL CULTURE	
<i>How the Liturgy Is More Relevant Than We Can Imagine</i>	55

CHAPTER 7

BIZARRE, HOLY MOMENTS

How the Liturgy Reshapes Our Sense of Time 64

CHAPTER 8

WHAT YOU DON'T SEE IS WHAT YOU GET

How the Liturgy Changes Our Sense of Place 70

CHAPTER 9

LITTLE STILLNESSES

How the Liturgy Guides Us into Focused Grace 77

CHAPTER 10

WE WORSHIP A MATERIAL SAVIOR

Why the Liturgy Engages the Whole Body 83

CHAPTER 11

LEARNING BY LAUGHING

How the Liturgy Teaches Us the Faith 90

CHAPTER 12

LIVING IN THE TRINITY

How the Liturgy Changes Us at the Very Core of Our Being 97

CHAPTER 13

DRUNKEN SOBRIETY

How the Liturgy Helps Us to Know God with Imagination 106

CHAPTER 14

WORDS OF LIVING W-A-T-E-R

The Liturgy as Poetic Reality that Transforms 111

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS 119

APPENDIX A

A LITURGY PRIMER 121

APPENDIX B

LITURGY COMPARED ACROSS TRADITIONS 126

APPENDIX C

THE CHRISTIAN YEAR 129

NOTES 133

INTRODUCTION

*And we all with unveiled face, beholding the glory
of the Lord, are being transformed into
the same image from one degree of glory to another.*

—ST. PAUL

I WRITE THIS BOOK FOR THOSE WHO FIND THEMSELVES ATTRACTED TO LITURGY but don't quite know why. For those immersed in liturgy and want to think more deeply about it. And for those who wonder if it is worth committing themselves to a liturgical church. The book is an attempt to explain how liturgy shapes us as we participate in it week after week, year after year.

The readers I hope will enjoy this book are those in or exploring Anglican, Presbyterian, Methodist, Lutheran, and Roman Catholic churches. (While the book should also have meaning for those exploring Eastern Orthodoxy, the Orthodox liturgy is too complex to be an entry point to liturgy, so I mostly use examples from the Western liturgies. Still, readers will note my dependence on Orthodox theology and writing, especially that of Alexander Schmemmann, and especially his *For the Life of the World: Sacraments and Orthodoxy*.)

We live in a spiritually restless culture. Some twelve million Americans are active participants in, and another thirty million are intrigued by, alternative spiritual systems. In the twentieth century, somewhere between 1,000 to 2,000 new

religious movements were formed in the United States. This gives American religious life a unique character—as sociologist Wayne Roof put it, “an eclectic mix of religious and spiritual ideas and practices.”

Since the days of the Puritans, Americans have had an irresistible impulse to create a uniquely personal spirituality, experimenting with divination, astrology, witchcraft, angelology, Swedenborgianism, transcendentalism, New Thought and New Age, and various forms of psychotherapy, seeking both experiential and ritualized faith.

Running parallel with this trend has been another, one that has been quiet and steadily growing as well: an ongoing fascination with orthodoxy, tradition, and the lasting rituals of the Christian faith. Colleen Carroll Campbell describes how and why young adults continue to be attracted to the traditional liturgy. In her book, *The New Faithful: Why Young Adults Are Embracing Christian Orthodoxy*, she says, “The benefits far surpass those of psychotherapy, chats with friends, even private prayer. For them, the sacraments and devotions of the institutional church allow them to be cleansed, healed, and strengthened. For young adults . . . these rites offer something so powerful that they weep in the face of it, so irresistible that they cannot walk away from it.”

A move toward informal and spontaneous worship is clearly a world trend (as witnessed by the growth of Pentecostalism), yet at the same time, the majority of Christians in the world today are Roman Catholics, Orthodox, Anglicans, and high-church Protestants in mainline churches. The liturgy—whose basic outline is the same in all these traditions—remains the staple of Sunday worship and daily prayer for millions for a reason: it

allows people to enter into an enduring story that makes sense of life, and allows them to enter into communion with God in a way that touches body, mind, and soul. So it's no surprise that an increasing number of low-church evangelicals are exploring liturgical worship, as well.

In this book, I try to show how the liturgy helps us enter a *counter-intuitive* story. In an individualistic culture, the liturgy helps us live a communal life. In a culture that values spontaneity, the liturgy grounds us in something enduring. In a culture that assumes that truth is a product of the mind, the liturgy helps us experience truth in both mind and body. In a world demanding instant relevance, the liturgy gives us the patience to live into a relevance that the world does not know. Its counter-intuitive nature makes the liturgy appear culturally strange at first, but in fact it's more like an intriguing story, full of mystery, that not only attracts but reshapes our perceptions and our lives.

A caution. The liturgy is not a magic potion or carpet ride. The dreariest services I've been to have been liturgical services. And the spiritually deadest churches I've attended have been rich in liturgy. When that is the case, I understand why the radical reformers rejected not only medieval Catholic doctrine but also Catholic worship—they found little life in the Spirit compared to their free-form services.

But there is a reason the liturgy has continued to be the staple of the bulk of Christendom: it remains a powerful context in which to meet and be transformed by God. Still, it should not surprise us that the liturgy is also one of the best places to hide from God. The Garden of Eden was a place where Adam and Eve enjoyed the goodness of God and hid from his presence.

Yet if we will refuse to hide within the ritual, it can work on us and in us to transform us. I believe—and it has been my experience—that ongoing participation in the liturgy is ongoing participation in the life of God and, as such, will lead, as C.S. Lewis envisions human transformation, to a life “dazzling, radiant . . . pulsating all through with . . . energy, joy, and wisdom and love as we cannot now imagine.”

CHAPTER 1

LIVING THE OLD, OLD STORY

The Basic Outline of the Liturgy

THE LITURGY LIVES OUT A STORY IN A STORY-DEPRIVED WORLD. Liturgy is not a once-upon-a-time story we merely watch others perform. We are the characters in this story, actors in the divine drama whose opening and closing has been written by Jesus Christ himself.

The story that modernity gave us has had its run. Its story arc was about progress, the notion that human life would get better and better because science and technology would solve the most nagging human problems. But events—two world wars, the Gulags, the holocaust, HIV/AIDS, and 9/11—and postmodern philosophy have revealed how weak this plot line was. Only the most hopeless romantics remain fascinated with it.

The failure of this story touches us personally, because we breathe the air of despair daily. We find it difficult to give ourselves to anything larger than the self; we simply don't trust anymore—not government, not business, not even the church. So we give our energy to career and comfort, to family and a few friends. We collapse into a cocoon of meaning, realizing in our more lucid moments that our little cocoon has no meaning larger than the self.

The liturgy speaks to us at this point. The liturgy is lucidity inducing. When we participate in it, even if we don't understand 90 percent of what is going on, we recognize intuitively how small our lives are, that the story we've concocted for ourselves

is but a child's nursery rhyme—and that we are being beckoned to enter a drama that is epic in scope.

Liturgy comes from a Greek word meaning “a public service.” When I refer to “the liturgy” in this book, I am referring to the public Sunday service performed by liturgical and mainline churches. I refer to it in the singular because the shape of the service is remarkably similar in all these traditions (see Appendix B).

Sometimes by *liturgy* I mean something wider in scope: the body of prayers and services that make up the whole life of a church—from daily prayer to Good Friday services to weddings and funerals. Many of these prayers and services can be found in more than one church tradition, while others are unique to only one. But overall these extra-Sunday services share the same larger characteristics of the public Sunday services that will be described in this book—especially a grounding in history and tradition that remains immediately relevant in paradoxical and mysterious ways.

Though different traditions divide the Sunday service in different ways with different terms, one common way is to think of the service, and the story it embodies, as having four “acts”: *Gathering*, *Word*, *Sacrament*, *Dismissal*. As we proceed, we'll see that the story is richer than this simple outline, because the liturgy contains a story within a story. It tells a story. It enacts a story. It is an episode in an unfolding story. But these four acts are at the heart of the larger story told within the liturgy.

The service begins with the *Gathering*, which is so much more than an efficient way to get things started. This part of

the service points us back to God's gathering the people of Israel to himself:

Let the redeemed of the LORD say so,
whom he has redeemed from trouble
and gathered in from the lands,
from the east and from the west,
from the north and from the south.

In the same way, the opening reminds us of God's gathering a people in Jesus Christ, symbolized in the calling of the twelve disciples to himself. The Gathering also points forward to the day when God will gather all those he has chosen to gather (who have not rejected his invitation) in a great festal celebration, as Isaiah said,

On this mountain the LORD of hosts will make for all peoples
a feast of rich food, a feast of well-aged wine,
of rich food full of marrow, of aged wine well refined.

The Gathering is no small thing.

The Gathering usually begins with the congregation singing a hymn, the joining together of all voices. This is a concrete, embodied way to signal that we are gathering as one people, not as a collection of individuals. Then comes the opening acclamation in the service:

Blessed be God: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.
And blessed be his kingdom, now and forever!

We will return to this opening response time and again in this book, because it signals so much of what is happening in the liturgy. For now, note how in the Gathering, we are already being pointed to the grand climax of the Christian story, having been gathered in a concrete way by a God whose very history has been to gather a people to himself.

The service then moves into the portion called the *Word*, the focus of which is the reading of Scripture. The Word is one of the two centers of the liturgy (so much so, that some liturgies describe the service as having just two parts: Word and Sacrament).

In a typical liturgical service, three Scripture passages are read each week: one from the Old Testament, one from the Pauline or General Epistles, and one from the Gospels. The service also includes the reading of a psalm. These readings are arranged in a three-year cycle so that we hear the entire biblical story: the Creation and the Fall, the Exodus, the Captivity and return, the promise and then the Advent of the Messiah, the coming of the Holy Spirit, and the promise of the coming kingdom.

The meaning of the biblical story unfolds week by week in the sermon, which follows immediately after the Scripture readings. This order signals that the sermon is grounded, not on the morning news or the book-of-the-month, but on the biblical story. Following the sermon, the biblical story is summarized as we read the Creed, which structures the story in three movements—Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

In the “act” called *Sacrament*, we partake of bread and wine in a ritual that is sometimes called “Communion” or “Eucharist.”

Before the partaking of bread and wine, the story is rehearsed in the Eucharistic prayer. This longer prayer reminds us about God's work in creation, fall, redemption, Pentecost, and the Second Coming. At the heart of this act is the participation in a great feast, the sharing of bread and wine. The bread and wine point back to the death and the Resurrection of Jesus Christ, and forward to his coming again. Thus by sharing this meal, we remember the whole sweep of our story.

This core of a liturgical service helps us remember symbolically our history and theology as a people, but more crucially, it is also the moment when Christ becomes present for us in a mysterious but remarkable way. Thus many books on the meaning of the liturgy rightly spend much time mining its depths. This book will not follow this pattern, because I want to highlight other aspects of the liturgy, as well. But if the liturgy is a story, the Eucharist is certainly the climax of that story, the larger story embedded in the liturgical story.

Similar to the Gathering, the *Dismissal* at the conclusion of the service is not merely a convenient way to get people out the door. During the Dismissal, we say a prayer asking God to send us out "to do the work you have given us to do." What is that work? To participate with God in calling out a people to be co-workers in God's great gathering mission, the same mission Isaiah felt deep in his spirit:

And now the LORD says,
he who formed me from the womb to be his servant,
to bring Jacob back to him;
and that Israel might be gathered to him. . . .

So, the liturgy teaches us *about* the story, especially in Word and Sacrament. But it does more. It also *embodies* the Christian story in its very structure—God gathers people for a great banquet at which he presides, gives us a Word, and offers us the fruit of his labor of love. From there, God sends us out to participate in the great gathering work.

By participating in the liturgy, we're doing more than "attending a service." We are entering a story—a story in which we also play a role. We are the people who have indeed been gathered. We are the people who share in God's very life. We are the people sent forth to proclaim God's story and to invite people into the grand story.

The dramatic sweep of the liturgical story is summarized well by Father Jeremy Driscoll:

The meaning of the whole creation and the whole of human history is contained here in ritual form and in the people who enact the ritual. This action will cause the Church to be: to do Eucharist is to be Church. To be Church, to be assembled into one, is what God intends for the world. The Eucharist is celebrated in thanksgiving and for the glory of God, and it is done for the salvation of the whole world.

For people who find themselves storyless, or with a story that has no larger meaning than the self, the liturgy is a salvation. It shows that we do not have to abandon hope; we don't have to fabricate a new myth to force meaning onto the world. We can participate in the very story of God—Father, Son, and Holy

Spirit—who has created and redeemed us, who has gathered us to himself already in a Great Feast, and who promises, in the last act, to gather all things on heaven and earth to himself, so that we may feast together for eternity.

CHAPTER 2

COSMIC DAYTIMER

*How the Liturgical Calendar Can Bring Order
to Our Lives*

THE PROFESSOR BEGAN OUR GRADUATE SEMINAR in historiography with a simple question: “Does anyone know what happened on October 3, 1951?”

I looked around the table at the eight other graduate students in history. We were studying at the University of California at Davis, just eighty miles from Candlestick Park, then home of the San Francisco Giants. Surely someone knew what the professor was talking about. But only blank stares responded. So I spoke up.

“That was the day Bobby Thompson hit ‘the shot heard round the world.’”

“Yes,” the professor replied. “Tell us about it.”

“Well, the New York Giants were behind the Brooklyn Dodgers 4-2, and it was the bottom of the ninth inning. The Giants had been eleven and a half games behind the Dodgers in early August but had caught them by the end of the season to tie for first place. This was the third game of the resulting playoffs, the teams having split the first two games. Bobby Thompson was up to bat with two runners on. A nervous rookie, Willie Mays, was in the on-deck circle. Thompson was facing Ralph Branca, who ironically, was wearing number thirteen.

“Branca threw a fastball for a called strike, followed by another pitch ‘up-and-in’ to intimidate Thompson. Didn’t work. Next