Praying the Liturgy

Workshop at Conference on Liturgy – God bless Africa

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The topic is not Praying *in* the Liturgy. Not praying as part of Liturgy; but praying the liturgy.

World wide there is a decline in number of people attending church services on a Sunday. The reason is mostly ascribed to the fact that there is a growing dissatisfaction with organised religion.

Is there in this climate still any place for worship services? My humble opinion: only if worship services become what they are so aptly and appropriately named; namely ***worship*** services.

Liturgy is more than form and ritualistic order. Too many people experience liturgy as a boring ritual in which there is no space for surprise and inspiration. This is especially true when the person leading the worship, goes into “auto-pilot” mode.

The question poses itself: What is necessary to happen for a worship service to become a real moment of worship?

It is only when the liturgy is being prayed that something opens up. Then the people who “came to church” really start worshipping.

# True theological foundations of liturgy

* A conviction about God
  + He is the Triune God. Our worship is to the Father, through the Son and in the Holy Spirit. Romans 8

***Likewise the Spirit helps us in our weakness. For we do not know what to pray for as we ought, but the Spirit himself intercedes for us with groanings too deep for words. 27 And he who searches hearts knows what is the mind of the Spirit, because[g] the Spirit intercedes for the saints according to the will of God.***

***Christ Jesus is the one who died—more than that, who was raised—who is at the right hand of God, who indeed is interceding for us.***

* + He is the Present One. Through and in Word and Spirit and sacraments.
  + He is the living God.
  + He is the loving and caring God. He longs for us. He wants communion with us.
* A conviction about the Church
  + We live for the glory of God. ***Romans 11: 36For from him and through him and to him are all things. To him be glory forever. Amen.***

The heavenly worship service of ***Revelations 4:  ... and day and night they never cease to say,***

***“Holy, holy, holy, is the Lord God Almighty,  
    who was and is and is to come!”***

***9And whenever the living creatures give glory and honor and thanks to him who is seated on the throne, who lives forever and ever, 10the twenty-four elders fall down before him who is seated on the throne and worship him who lives forever and ever. They cast their crowns before the throne, saying,***

***11“Worthy are you, our Lord and God,  
    to receive glory and honor and power,  
for you created all things,  
    and by your will they existed and were created.”***

* The curch’s default attitude is joy. Also in worship
* A conviction about liturgy
  + Liturgy is only and ever a means to an end. It may never be an end in itself
  + Liturgy can never be on *auto pilot*
  + Liturgy is a corporate act; never a one person show
  + Liturgy lives in two worlds. It is always contextual and real, but at the same time: heavenly and out of this world. A similarity and a dissimilarity with this world. In this world but not of this world.
  + Worship is not something I do (once a week). It is (shoud be) a way of living.

# A short history of Liturgy

* The Old Testament temple cult
  + Festivities as remembrance of God’s acts in history
  + The cultic sacrifices
  + The reading of God’s word (the Book of the Law of Moses
* The New Testament
  + The Lord’s Supper
  + Preaching the gospel about Jesus
* Liturgical deformation since the time of Emperor Constantine
* Hierarchy, robes, pagan festivities, liturgical luxuriousness became part of liturgy
* A sharp distinction between clerici and laeci
* The worship goers became mere spectators
* Reformation
* The reformation was essentially a liturgical reformation and not a doctrinal reformation
* The worship goers became participants
* Always the danger of too much emphasis on a didactic liturgy
* Today
* A show to entertain. Compete with multi media
* Very little expectation that anything transformational can happen in worship

An observation: The pendulum in liturgy always swings between cognitive knowledge about God and an experience of God

# A definition of Liturgy as worship

A worship service is the coming of God’s people into the presence of God to meet with Him and one another for a very special moment in time to enjoy each other’s company.

It is more than a conversation.

# A definition of Prayer

Prayer is the coming of an individual and or a group of people in the presence of God to give to Him and to receive from Him.

**Conclusion: Prayer is worship and Worship is prayer!**

**Preconditions for realising our thesis that: True liturgy must be carried by and embedded in prayer**

* The role of the worship leader
  + Embody the convictions about God and church and liturgy
  + Be aware of the Present One
* Prayer pre, during and post the worship service
  + During
    - Use the Psalms
    - Corporate prayer
      * The Lord’s prayer
      * Singing together
      * Use of silence
* The role of preaching in Liturgy
* The way the worship goers think of Liturgy. It is important to understand:
  + Worship is a gift of God to us
  + Worship is a gift from us to God
  + Worship is my responsibility
  + Worship can change people’s lives