

Worshiping and Praying With the BCP

Week 1: Why Pray Liturgically? (It's more than aesthetic preference)

C.S. Lewis on desire

“If we consider the unblushing promises of reward and the staggering nature of the rewards promised in the Gospels, it would seem that Our Lord finds our desires, not too strong, but too weak. We are half-hearted creatures, fooling about with drink and sex and ambition when infinite joy is offered us, like an ignorant child who wants to go on making mud pies in a slum because he cannot imagine what is meant by the offer of a holiday at the sea. We are far too easily pleased.”

C.S. Lewis, *The Weight of Glory, and Other Addresses*

A reading from a letter by Augustine, Bishop of Hippo [430 AD]

“Why [God] should ask us to pray, when he knows what we need before we ask him, may perplex us if we do not realize that our Lord and God does not want to know what we want (for he cannot fail to know it), but rather wants us to exercise our desires through our prayers, so that we may be able to receive what he is preparing to give us. His gifts are very great indeed, but our capacity is too small and limited to receive it... The deeper our faith, the stronger our hope, the greater our desire, the larger will be our capacity to receive that gift, which is very great indeed.”

Quoted in J. Robert Wright, *Readings For the Daily Office From the Early Church* (New York: Church Publishing, 1991), 377.

A reading from a letter by Augustine, Bishop of Hippo [430 AD]

“Let us always desire the happy life from the Lord God and always pray for it. But for this very reason we turn our mind to the task of prayer at appointed hours, since that desire grows lukewarm, so to speak, from our involvement in other concerns and occupations. We remind ourselves through the words of prayer to focus our attention on the object of our desire; otherwise, the desire that began to grow lukewarm may grow chill altogether and may be totally extinguished unless it is repeatedly stirred into flame.”

Quoted in J. Robert Wright, *Readings For the Daily Office From the Early Church* (New York: Church Publishing, 1991), 406.

ASSIGNMENT: WRITING A COLLECT

First, reflect on your spiritual history and your prayer life using the questions below:

- What feelings come up for you when you think about your history with God in prayer?
- What feelings come up for you when you think about cultivating (or adjusting) a habit of daily prayer?
- What longings do you have when you think about your life in God?

Then, using your reflections from the questions above, write a *collect*. A collect is a specific type of prayer rooted in the pattern of prayer for the people of God revealed in Scripture. They have the following general formula:

1. An address of God,
2. A declaration of some attribute or action of God,
3. A specific request of God,
4. (Often) the reason for the request or the hoped-for result of the answered prayer, and
5. A christological or trinitarian finale, along with an Amen.

Here's an example, from *The Book of Common Prayer*:

O God, whose blessed Son made himself known to his disciples in the breaking of bread: Open the eyes of our faith, that we may behold him in all his redeeming work; who lives and reigns with you, in the unity of the Holy Spirit, one God, now and for ever. **Amen.**

(Collect for the Third Sunday of Easter, BCP p. 224)

Note the address ("O God"), the declaration of God's action/attribute ("whose blessed Son made himself known to his disciples in the breaking of bread"), the specific request ("Open the eyes of our faith"), with a reason/result attached ("that we may behold him..."), ending with a trinitarian formula.

You can see lots of other examples of collects in the BCP, especially in "The Collects: Contemporary" section, starting on page 211.

Okay, your turn! Using your reflections above, **write a short collect** you can pray this week and during the class as we learn to use the BCP to cultivate a habit of daily prayer.