

The Worship of the Saints

Introduction to the Service: Dear friends in Christ: today we celebrate the feast of All Saints. It's a day the Church sets aside to remember and thank the Lord for those who have gone before us in the faith, who preserved the truth of the Gospel in their day and helped pass it down to us, and who have since been received into glory by the Savior who redeemed them. Now, as we will hear in today's first reading, they stand before the throne of God and the Lamb worshipping them in the heavenly Temple high above us. It occurred to me, then, that we saints below are never closer to the saints in heaven above, and there is no activity that unites us to them more than when we are joining together in worship and celebrating our oneness in Christ. For that reason I thought that today would be a good time to review once again the way we worship.

The basic components of the Divine Service liturgies that we use on the Sundays we celebrate Holy Communion and their essential sequence within the service are always the same. There's the Invocation, the Introit, the Kyrie, the Gloria in Excelsis, and so on. They never change, though they do appear in different settings. These various parts of the service have roots that are very ancient. Most date back to the earliest days of the Christian Church. Some go back even earlier: to the worship of ancient Israel some 3500 years ago. So, when we participate in a Divine Service, we are joining in the way God's people have always worshipped. It's a way of worship that is rich in meaning and substance, but unfortunately, people being people, we tend to fall into familiar patterns. It's all too easy to participate without thinking about what we're doing, what we're saying, or even wondering *why* we're doing and saying it. And to be fair, rarely do people in my position take the time to explain it. The result is that we can fall into kind of a mindless ritualism – doing what we do for no other reason than to keep alive a tradition that no one understands.

That's bad. We don't want to be just going through the motions of a dead ritual. So what I'd like to do this morning is spend some time taking a deeper look at the Divine Service, pull it apart step by step, and in good Lutheran fashion, like we learned from the catechism, ask the question, "What does this mean?"

Invocation:

Matthew 28:19-20 Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, **baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit**, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And **surely I am with you always**, to the very end of the age."

Romans 6:3-4 Or don't you know that all of us who were **baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death?** ⁴We were therefore **buried with him through baptism into death in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, we too may live a new life.**

Galatians 3:27 For all of you who were **baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ.**

So, I'll ask the congregation to rise, and to turn with me to page 184 of the hymnal: Divine Service III. And as you turn there, I want you to consider that one of the major themes of our worship is the gracious presence of God with his people. It's almost as if there's a question being asked over and over again; and that question is this: "Where is God?", or "Where is Jesus Christ?" The Divine Service answers that question. And the answer is always the same:

it's "He's here; the Lord Jesus is right here with us. *And yet* he is coming in a still greater or fuller sense". *He's here* and *he's coming*. Keep that in mind.

We see that the service begins with what's called the *Invocation*. To "invoke" means to "call upon a higher power". And certainly it makes sense to begin our worship by calling upon the Lord to be with us; after all, he's the One we've come to worship. But "to invoke" also means, "to speak with conferred authority" – like in the old days when a soldier might pound on someone's door and say, "Open in the name of the king." Obviously the soldier is not the king; but as the king's authorized agent, he could invoke the king's authority and speak in the king's name. Our *invocation* includes that idea. Yes, we call upon the Lord, but we do so with his authority. He's conferred upon us the right to speak in his name, and he's given us the assurance that he will hear and answer us. He made that promise to us in our Baptisms. That's where the Christian life begins, and so that's where we begin our worship. Jesus told his disciples to Baptize in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. And in Baptism, the Lord did several things for you. First, he put his name on you. He became your Father, and you became his child and heir. Secondly, Scripture tells us that in Baptism you became "clothed with Christ", and "united with Jesus in his death, burial, and resurrection" – which speaks of God's forgiveness given to you. That, incidentally, is why you see that red cross symbol in front of the word "Son". It tells you that, if you wish, you may make the sign of the cross on yourself to remind you that ever since your Baptism the Lord sees you as one marked and redeemed by the cross of Jesus. And no, it's not a Roman Catholic thing to do; it's a *Christian* thing to do – as long as you know why you're doing it. Finally, we're also told that in Baptism, God sent his Holy Spirit to dwell in you. So, in Baptism, you are connected to the three Persons of the Trinity and made part of the Triune God's family. And as a member of the family, you can use the family name. And you can be certain that when you use it, the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit are with you. So, when we use the invocation, we're answering the worship question: "Where's God?" Answer: "He's right here with us. We know it for sure because we have been baptized into the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit." All this being said, let's call now upon the name of the Lord. [The pastor speaks the Invocation].

Confession:

1 John 1:8-9 If we claim to be without sin, we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us. If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness.

So the Lord is here with us on account of our Baptisms – but he is also coming to us in a greater or fuller sense. Remember? That's the other part of the answer. And you know, when someone important is coming to your house, you probably spend a lot of time cleaning it to get ready for their arrival. Well, we've got our Lord Jesus coming to us. So it's appropriate that we clean house before he arrives – especially in a spiritual sense. The thing of it is that the kind of cleaning that needs to be done, the wiping away of sin, can only be performed by God himself. That's what our confession of sin is all about. In what is really a return to our Baptisms, the Lord invites us to confess our sins before him so that we can be assured once again that our sins have been forgiven for Christ's sake. So let's confess our sins in order to prepare ourselves to receive the Lord Jesus again. [Congregation joins in the confession of sins, p. 184]

Absolution:

John 20:22-23 And with that [Jesus] breathed on them and said, "**Receive the Holy Spirit. If you forgive anyone his sins, they are forgiven; if you do not forgive them, they are not forgiven.**"

We read in John's Gospel, "[Jesus] breathed on his disciples and said, 'Receive the Holy Spirit. If you forgive anyone his sins, they are forgiven; if you do not forgive them, they are not forgiven'." We understand by these words that Christ has given his Church the responsibility of warning those who do not repent that their sins are not forgiven; but to those who do repent, as you just have, the Church has the authority to forgive sins. This forgiveness is as sure and certain as if spoken by Christ himself for he is the one who authorized the Church to speak these words. You may note too that toward the end of the words of absolution, there's that red cross symbol again suggesting that you may wish to make the sign of the cross on yourself as you hear these words spoken because they assure you that your sins are covered by the cross of Jesus [The pastor speaks the words of Absolution]

Introit:

John 1:14 **The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us.** We have seen his glory, the glory of the One and Only, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth.

Very good. Our God is here with us, and the house is clean in preparation for his greater coming. Now what do we do? Well, if someone with a lot of power and authority to change your life for the better told you that he was stopping by to help you, he might tell you in advance in what way he wants to help you. That's what the "introit" is. It's Latin for "he comes in" or "he enters". In the old days, it was at this point in the worship service that the Scriptures were brought by procession into the church. And so the introit was like a fanfare recognizing arrival of the Lord Jesus, who comes to us in his Word. It tells us that we are about receive him again as we hear the Scriptures read. We use the introit the same way today, though we don't physically bring the Scriptures in – we just make the mental shift to prepare to hear what Jesus has to say. The themes expressed in the introit give everyone an idea about what today's topic of conversation is going to be. Today's introit is on Psalm 149. Let's read it responsively.

Kyrie:

Luke 17:11-13 Now on his way to Jerusalem, Jesus traveled along the border between Samaria and Galilee. As he was going into a village, ten men who had leprosy met him. They stood at a distance and called out in a loud voice, "**Jesus, Master, have mercy on us!**"

Matthew 20:29-32 As Jesus and his disciples were leaving Jericho, a large crowd followed him. Two blind men were sitting by the roadside, and when they heard that Jesus was going by, they shouted, "**Lord, Son of David, have mercy on us!**"

The crowd rebuked them and told them to be quiet, but they shouted all the louder, "**Lord, Son of David, have mercy on us!**"

Jesus stopped and called them. "**What do you want me to do for you?**" he asked.

All right, please turn back to page 186. We know Jesus is coming and he's about to speak; but the conversation goes two ways. During Jesus' ministry on earth he traveled from town to town to teach people about the kingdom of God; but wherever he went, he was met by people with serious problems. They were blind, lame, sick, leprous, dying, dead. And they or someone who cared about them would come to Jesus for help and cry out "Lord, have mercy." That's what the "Kyrie" is. It's short for "Kyrie eleison" which is Latin for, "Lord, have mercy." It's the most general prayer of the Church in which we recognize that we are spiritually blind, lame, sick, leprous, dying, and dead and that we need Jesus' help; also that we trust that he will. [The Kyrie is sung.]

Hymn of Praise (Gloria in Excelsis):

Luke 2:9-14 An angel of the Lord appeared to them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were terrified. But the angel said to them, “Do not be afraid. I bring you good news of great joy that will be for all the people. Today in the town of David a Savior has been born to you; he is Christ the Lord. This will be a sign to you: You will find a baby wrapped in cloths and lying in a manger.” Suddenly a great company of the heavenly host appeared with the angel, praising God and saying, **“Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace to men on whom his favor rests.”**

Our Lord is very much concerned about our problems; so concerned, in fact, that he entered our fallen world at the first Christmas, becoming our brother in flesh to save us. He took on himself our weaknesses, our limitations, our sorrows, our aches and pains. And when Jesus went from place to place, he took on himself our diseases, our uncleanness – he even took on our sin and the death we deserved. What kind of God would do such a thing? The wonder of it is enough to leave us speechless; and so without words of our own, we join the choirs of angels who sang at his birth, “Glory be to God on high and on earth peace, good-will toward men.” That’s what the Gloria in Excelsis on page 187 is: a hymn of praise to the Word who was made flesh and comes to live with us. And traditionally the pastor chants the initial few words alone because at first only one angel appeared to the shepherds to announce the birth of Christ. Then the congregation joins in to remind us how it happened that the sky was then filled with angels singing praise to God.

Salutation and Collect:

Psalms 5:3 In the morning, O LORD, you hear my voice; in the morning I lay my requests before you and wait in expectation.

Now we’re ready for the next step. It begins when the pastor says to the congregation “The Lord be with you.” He’s saying, Jesus is here in his Word. I want *this* presence of Jesus to be with you. The congregation responds, “And with thy spirit.” You’re saying, “Yes, we want Jesus to be with us through the Words you are about to speak. So may Jesus be with your spirit so that we hear him through you.” Next comes the collect, which is a rather strange word. Some people think it means the offering. That’s not it. No, when people came to Jesus for help, he would often ask them, “What is it you want me to do for you?” Our answer to that question is what we call the “collect” because it’s the collective desire of our hearts. You’ll find today’s collect written in your bulletin. Let’s pray it together: Almighty and everlasting God, You knit together Your faithful people of all times and places into one holy communion, the mystical body of Your Son, Jesus Christ. Grant to us so to follow Your blessed saints in all virtuous living that, together with them, we may come to the unspeakable joys You have prepared for those who love You; through Jesus Christ, Your Son, our Lord, who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever.

Readings: God hears our prayers and answers them. The readings for any Sunday worship service are God’s answer to the prayer we just prayed in the Collect. It’s God saying, “Okay, now that I know what you want, let me tell you how I am answering your prayer.” As you listen to the readings for today, pay close attention to how they respond directly to the things we asked for in the collect. [The first lesson and epistle are read.]

As we listen to God’s word, you’ll notice that there’s kind of a build up to the Gospel reading. It is thought of as a high point in our worship because it contains the Words actually spoken by the Lord Jesus. And so, it’s set apart in a place of honor. That’s what the Alleluia

verse at the center of page 190, and the sentences of praise that bracket the Gospel reading on page 190 and 191 are meant to do. Alleluia is an exclamation that means “praise the Lord!” Let’s continue with the Alleluia and Gospel reading.

The Creed:

Romans 10:8b-10 “The word is near you; it is in your mouth and in your heart,” that is, the word of faith we are proclaiming: That if you confess with your mouth, “Jesus is Lord,” and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved. For it is with your heart that you believe and are justified, and it is with your mouth that you confess and are saved.

That brings us to the Creed on page 191. When God speaks, his people respond in faith saying, “Lord, I believe what you’ve said.” That’s what the Creed is. It’s us saying back to God, “I’ve listened to your Word, Lord, and having listened, this is what I believe.” [All recite the Nicene Creed.]

The Hymn of the Day:

That brings us to the Hymn of the Day. In our tradition, hymns are intended mostly to help teach and reinforce the faith. This is especially true of the hymn that comes right before the sermon. Normally you will see in this hymn the same themes and ideas that appear in the readings for the day – and I always try to have you sing the sermon before I preach it. Today’s hymn of the day is number 671.

Sermon:

Matthew 5:1-2 Now when he saw the crowds, he went up on a mountainside and sat down. His disciples came to him, and **he began to teach them**, saying:

John 21:17c Jesus said [to Peter], “**Feed my sheep**”

1 Corinthians 1:23-24 **We preach Christ crucified:** a stumbling block to Jews and foolishness to Gentiles, but to those whom God has called, both Jews and Greeks, **Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God.**

The purpose of the sermon is to teach God’s Word and apply it to our lives. It may not always be immediately obvious what the Scripture readings mean or how they really are an answer to our deepest needs. A good sermon will make it clear. Today’s sermon is this running commentary on worship service itself. So let’s continue.

Offertory:

Psalms 96:8 Ascribe to the LORD the glory due his name; bring an offering and come into his courts.

Psalms 116:17 I will sacrifice a thank offering to you and call on the name of the LORD.

Psalms 51:10-12 Create in me a pure heart, O God, and renew a steadfast spirit within me. Do not cast me from your presence or take your Holy Spirit from me. Restore to me the joy of your salvation and grant me a willing spirit to sustain me.

Up to this point in the worship service, we’ve been receiving God’s gifts – now, after the sermon, having heard all that God has done for us in Jesus Christ, the people of God respond with praise, thanksgiving, and the offerings of the first fruits of his blessings to us. That’s what

the offering and the anthem called the offertory are. This particular offertory (bottom of page 192) is from Psalm 51, and it asks the Lord to cleanse our hearts and renew our spirits so that we can offer ourselves and our service to others as living sacrifices to the Lord. [Proceed with the offering and offertory.]

The Prayers:

Psalm 102:1 (A prayer of an afflicted man. When he is faint and pours out his lament before the LORD.) Hear my prayer, O LORD; let my cry for help come to you.

Philippians 4:6-7 Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God. And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.

Earlier we prayed the collective prayer of the whole church. At this point in the service, we offer specific petitions for other things that concern our own local congregation. Usually we start with the more general requests, and move progressively on to specific concerns and individuals whom we want to commit to the Lord's care.

Communion Liturgy:

Acts 2:42 They devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and to the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer.

1 Corinthians 11:26 For whenever you eat this bread and drink this cup, you proclaim the Lord's death until he comes.

The service of Holy Communion marks another high point in our worship. And again, we find the flow of the service asking the question, "Where is Jesus?" The answer, as always, is "He's here, and yet he is coming in a greater sense." We know he's here because of our Baptisms, and because of his presence in the Word; but now he is coming to us in his sacrificed body and blood to assure us once again of his love and forgiveness.

We see this reflected in the sentences that begin the communion service on page 194. The pastor says, "The Lord be with you". He's saying that he wants the Lord Jesus, who is now about to come to us again in a very special way – he wants *this* presence of Christ to be with *you*. You reply, "And with your spirit". It means, "Yes, and we want him to be with you too, and for Jesus to come to us through your ministry at the altar." Then the pastor says, "Lift up your hearts." It means, okay then, get ready for the Lord's coming by lifting your heart to him so that he can heal it. You reply, "We lift them up to the Lord." We're ready! Finally the pastor says, "Let us give thanks to the Lord our God" in anticipation of what he is about to do for us. And you reply, "It is meet and right so to do". It means, "Yes, that's the right thing to do."

The Proper Preface and Sanctus:

Isaiah 6:1-9 In the year that King Uzziah died, I saw the Lord seated on a throne, high and exalted, and the train of his robe filled the temple. Above him were seraphs, each with six wings: With two wings they covered their faces, with two they covered their feet, and with two they were flying. And they were calling to one another: "**Holy, holy, holy is the LORD God of Sabaoth; the whole earth is full of his glory.**" At the sound of their voices the doorposts and thresholds shook and the temple was filled with smoke. "Woe to me!" I cried. "I am ruined! For I am a man of unclean lips, and I live among a people of unclean lips, and my eyes have seen the King, the LORD Almighty." **Then one of the seraphs flew to**

me with a live coal in his hand, which he had taken with tongs from the altar. With it he touched my mouth and said, “See, this has touched your lips; your guilt is taken away and your sin atoned for.”

Matthew 21:8-9 A very large crowd spread their cloaks on the road, while others cut branches from the trees and spread them on the road. The crowds that went ahead of him and those that followed shouted, **“Hosanna to the Son of David!” “Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord!” “Hosanna in the highest!”**

What follows is a prayer of praise chanted or spoken by the pastor thanking the Lord for the gift of his Son in Holy Communion. That leads into an ancient hymn called the *Sanctus* on page 195. *Sanctus* means, “holy”, and it comes from a portion of Isaiah, where the angels around the throne of God are crying out, “Holy, Holy, Holy, Lord God of Sabaoth, the whole earth is full of your glory.” This is from a vision of the prophet, who finds himself a lowly sinner in the presence of God. It terrifies him. He knows that as a sinner, he deserves God’s wrath and punishment. He feels that he’s about to be destroyed. But instead of vaporizing him, as he fears, an angel flies to the altar, takes from it a burning coal, and touches it to the prophet’s lips. This messenger of God says, “See, this has touched your lips; your guilt is taken away and your sins atoned for.” We understand that the same thing is about to happen to us. When the words of institution are spoken, we will be standing in the presence of God – but he’s not here to judge or terrify us, he’s here to take away our guilt and fear. And instead of a burning coal, it’s the very body and blood of the Savior that will touch our lips and take our guilt away.

The second part of the *Sanctus* is the same hymn that was sung by the people of Jerusalem on Palm Sunday, when Jesus came to them. They hailed him as King and cried out their hosannas – hosanna being a prayer that literally means, “Oh please, save us now!” As it turns out, he was coming to save them: by his sacrificial death on the cross. That’s how he saves all people who trust in him. So we too rightly sing, “Hosanna, blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord!” [The Proper Preface and *Sanctus* are sung.]

The Lord’s Prayer and Words of Institution, which follow, are self explanatory.

The Peace and Agnus Dei:

John 20:19 On the evening of the first day of the week, when the disciples were together, with the doors locked for fear of the Jews, Jesus came and stood among them and said, **“Peace be with you!”**

John 1:29 The next day John saw Jesus coming toward him and said, **“Look, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world!”**

The words of institution having been spoken, we understand that now Jesus is with us: his body and blood in, with and under the bread and wine. He’s here to give us his peace, just as he gave it to his disciples when they first saw the crucified and risen Lord. So the pastor announces this peace to the congregation. And you respond by saying “Amen!” Yes! We believe. Then you sing another very old hymn called the *Agnus Dei*, which means, Lamb of God. It comes from that place in Scripture where John the Baptist first recognizes the Lord Jesus and points him out to the people, saying, “Behold the Lamb of God that takes away the sin of the world.” That’s what you’re saying. In the consecrated bread and wine, there he is: the Lamb of God who is taking away our sin. Then we come forward to receive the Lord Jesus, and to be touched by him like Isaiah was – but more than just touched, actually fed, nourished, and strengthened in faith by his gift to us of his body and blood.

Post-Communion Canticle and Thanksgiving:

Psalm 106:1-2 Praise the LORD. Give thanks to the LORD, for he is good; his love endures forever. Who can proclaim the mighty acts of the LORD or fully declare his praise?

Psalm 107:1-2 Give thanks to the LORD, for he is good; his love endures forever. Let the redeemed of the LORD say this—those he redeemed from the hand of the foe.

Luke 2:29-32 “Sovereign Lord, as you have promised, you now dismiss your servant in peace. For my eyes have seen your salvation, which you have prepared in the sight of all people, a light for revelation to the Gentiles and for glory to your people Israel.”

After the distribution of Communion, it's appropriate that we again give thanks for God's gifts of grace. That's what the Post-Communion Canticle on page 199 and the prayer of thanksgiving that follows it are. The canticle itself is a musical rendition of what a very old man named Simeon said when he was allowed to hold the Christ child in his arms. When he is able to touch and see the Lord Jesus, he knows that God is fulfilling all of his promises, and with that, he is assured that he can die in peace. The same is true of us. We've just seen and touched the Savior in his Supper, and because we know the Savior has born our sins, we have no fear of death. We know that we will be raised with him and given eternal life.

Salutation and Benediction:

Numbers 6:22-27 The LORD said to Moses, “Tell Aaron and his sons, ‘This is how you are to bless the Israelites. Say to them: **The LORD bless you and keep you; the LORD make his face shine upon you and be gracious to you; the LORD turn his face toward you and give you peace. So they will put my name on the Israelites, and I will bless them.**”

The service concludes with the blessing of God on his people. It reminds us that though we have here met with God in our worship in a very special way, he is with us and in us all the time and everywhere we go because he has placed his name upon us. And because he is with us, his love and blessing are with us as well, both here in time and in eternity. And again, as we head out into to world to live in God's love, the service answers the question, “Where is God?” He's here; and yet he is coming. He's here with us because he's placed his name on us; He's here in his Word; He's here in the Holy Supper; and yet, we look forward to his coming in the greatest of all ways: when he returns to take us to be with him forever. [The Pastor gives the Benediction]

We've covered a lot today. I pray that some of it will stick and that it will enrich your understanding of future worship services and your participation in them. That was today's goal: that we might better join ourselves with saints above and here below in realizing and celebrating our oneness in Christ as we worship him together and receive his gifts. Let's complete the service with the final hymn.

Soli Deo Gloria!