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PRAYING THE SERVICE (CONCLUSION)

With the recitation of the Apostles' Creed, we make the transition from the second part of the service – the Praise of God in his word – to the third part, the Prayers for his grace. To understand this transition, it is important to recall that the Creed originated in the Church of Rome, in the 2nd and 3rd centuries, as a confession of faith required before baptism. It is thus a personal confession of faith (a "testimonial"), but expressed in the objective terms of an authoritative summary of the apostolic witness proclaimed by the Church and recorded in the New Testament. Charles Wheatley, an 18th-century commentator on the Prayer Book, explains its relation to the Bible: "though the scriptures be a perfect revelation of all divine truths necessary to salvation; yet the fundamental articles of our faith are so dispersed there, that it was thought necessary to collect out of those sacred writings one plain and short summary of fundamental doctrines, which might easily be understood and remembered by all Christians." Like the other two ancient Creeds (the Nicene and the Athanasian) it is a touchstone of orthodox teaching, a standard by which to measure and frame our opinions and hopes, and a mark of our unity in the faith. Its daily recitation is a pledge that we "hold fast the profession of our faith without wavering" (Hebrews 10.23).

For many centuries, it was recited privately before the daily office; and by the 9th century it was included among the prayers at the lesser hours of Prime and Compline. In his revision, Cranmer moved it to the place it now occupies, before the prayers. Wheatley explains the significance of this placement: "That which goes before it are the lessons taken out of the word of God: for faith comes by hearing [Romans 10.17]; and therefore when we have heard God's word, it is fit we should profess our belief in it, thereby setting our seals, as it were, to the truth of God [John 3.33], especially to such articles as the chapters now read to us have confirmed. What follows the Creed are the prayers which are grounded upon it: for we cannot call on Him in whom we have not believed [Romans 10.14]. And therefore since we are to pray to God the Father, in the name of the Son, by the assistance of the Holy Ghost, for remission of sins, and a joyful resurrection; we first declare that we believe in God the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost; and that there is remission here, and a resurrection to life hereafter, for all true members of the catholic Church; and then we may be said to pray in faith."

The Creed is said standing, "to signify our resolution to stand up stoutly in the defense of it"; and facing east (or, in churches set up like St. John's, the altar), in token of our faith in the new day of salvation which dawned in Christ's resurrection, and will be consummated in his coming again. It is an old custom, sanctioned by the Church, for the faithful to bow their heads at the name of Jesus, "testifying by these outward ceremonies and gestures their inward humility, Christian resolution, and due acknowledgement, that the Lord Jesus Christ, the true eternal Son of God, is the Saviour of the world, in whom alone all the mercies, graces, and promises of God to mankind for this life, and the life to come, are fully and wholly comprised" (18th Canon of 1604). Many Anglicans also cross themselves at the words "resurrection of the dead", recalling the consignation at baptism, which is done "in token that [a Christian] shall not be ashamed to confess the faith of Christ crucified, and manfully to fight under his banner, against sin, the world, and the devil, and to remain Christ's faithful soldier and servant all his life long."

Having laid the foundation of faith in the psalms, lessons, canticles, and recitation of the Creed, we turn in the prayers to the exercise of hope, by claiming the promises of grace made in his word. The mutual salutation with which the Prayers begin ("The Lord be with you"; "and with thy spirit"), indicates that they are exercises of mutual charity. We claim the promises of the grace for one another within the Church's unity of faith. The Prayers (sometimes known by their Latin title, *Preces* – "Pray-sees") formerly continued with the Lesser Litany ("Lord have mercy upon us; Christ have mercy upon us; Lord have mercy upon us"), in which our sense of the need for God's grace is renewed; and then the Lord's Prayer, in which he gave us the grace of prayer. After the Lord's Prayer, and applying its grace, there were a number of short versicles and responses drawn from the psalms. These elements – lesser litany, Lord's Prayer, versicles and responses – have been abbreviated in the '28 Prayer book. This sequence of need, grace, and faith concludes with the pithy ancient prayers known as "collects" (pronounced CALL-ect, rather than co-LECT): the Collect for the day (usually the collect of the previous Sunday), and two unchanging collects appropriate to the hour. Cranmer's office originally ended there; and in many circumstances it suffices still. Within the broad categories of these prayers there is room enough for all our particular requests to be made.

In subsequent revisions, however, beginning with that of 1559, these prayers were gradually extended with intercessions for those in civil authority, for the clergy and people of the church, for "all sorts and conditions of men", for the unity of all Christians, and for the comfort of those in adversity. In these "state prayers" there is a truth late modern individualists may overlook; that the best interests of the individual are very much dependent upon the health of the institutions of church and state. After the State Prayers other "occasional prayers" (such as those found in the '28 Prayer Book on pp. 35-53) may be said; and, by longstanding custom, the General Thanksgiving (a small masterpiece of prayer written by a 17th c. Puritan bishop) is recited by all.

In much contemporary liturgy, our individualism finds expression in the practice of particular intercession: the priest, or individuals in the congregation, asking prayers for individuals by name (sometimes in great numbers). Some particular intercession has its place; and always

has. Even the general categories of the Prayer Book prayers are meant to be filled – silently - with the particular requests of each Christian. In locating the particular within the general, the Prayer Book teaches contemporary individual-ists that the good of the individual cannot be obtained apart from the good of the whole. We approach the good, as we approach the truth, only in and through our communion with one another. That is the very thought expressed in the closing Prayer of St. Chrysostom (another small masterpiece, borrowed from the ancient liturgy of the Greek Orthodox churches) and the Grace (2 Corinthians. 13.14). Thanking God for the grace he has given “with one accord to make our common supplications unto thee”, and submitting them entirely to his perfect will for our good in this world and the next, we are ready to depart with the benediction of the triune God’s grace, love, and fellowship.

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