

The Elizabethan



The Newsletter of St. Elizabeth Episcopal Church Burien, Washington

June 2018

From Fr. John: The practice of praying the “Divine Offices”

“The true monk should have prayer and psalmody continually in the heart.”
~ Abba Epiphanius

Our Benedictine and Celtic forebears in the faith left a legacy of spiritual practices for Episcopalians. Abba Epiphanius’ urging is still valid for all Anglicans. Our liturgy has been described as a school where, through sign and symbol, word and music, our minds and hearts are formed to be in union with God. St. Benedict meant for his monks and nuns to be close to creation, and so considered the liturgical seasons along with the annual cycle of seasons.

The daily cycle of prayer is called the *Opus Dei*, literally the “work of God.” The practice of praying morning, noon, evening and nighttime has also been called a celebration of the seasons of the day. The *Opus Dei* seeks to give voice to the transcendent expression of Christ through us and in us, and toward which we rise.

Monastics have modified the daily prayer services, called the “divine office” or “the hours,” defined in the Rule of St. Benedict depending on their order, the size of the community and the times they live in. Cluniacs in the 11th century, for example, prayed communally for eight hours each day, rather than the four that Benedict prescribed. Smaller communities have had to spend less time with this activity simply because of the difficulty of doing them justice. But through the years, Benedictines have tried to maintain the integrity of the Divine Office.

Some of the more recent changes that came in response to Vatican II some 50 years ago included the shift from Latin to native tongues and a shift in emphasis from quantity to quality. Most monasteries are no longer able to pray the entire 150 psalms each week, but many monastics find the slower pace preferable. The modified offices continue to be marked by gravity, serenity, silence and reverence.

Chapters 8 through 20 of the Rule are concerned with the details of the Divine Office. They receive a greater attention because it is intended to be the monastic communities’ primary work. Chapter 16, for instance, lays out the seven Hours and Chapter 17 deals with the number of psalms to be sung at these hours, while Chapter 18 provides the order of psalmody. Worth noting is Benedict’s typical tolerance and understanding as he counsels that “if anyone finds this distribution of psalms unsatisfactory, he should arrange whatever he judges better.” (*continued on page two*)

(continued from page one)

The Anglican liturgy is based on Benedictine rhythms of prayer because it was Benedictines, together with Celtic monks, who established the church in England. In fact, the first and several later Archbishops of Canterbury were Benedictine monks. It was not the king's intent to break from the Roman Catholic tradition, but specifically from the papacy, which is why these rhythms remain with the Anglican church to this day.

Other than Morning, Noon and Evening Prayer and the Mass, the offices have become primarily monastic, but according to Aiden Kavanagh, O.S.B., a professor of Liturgics at Yale's Divinity School, they were originally a public liturgy. "By the fifth century," he writes, "the churches in Jerusalem, Antioch, Alexandria, Rome and Constantinople were worshiping through a series of interlocking services that gave form not only to the day but to the entire week, the year and time itself. The time consumed by these seven events may have been between six and eight hours, not counting the intervals between them." The entire city was involved, although few people attended all services.

The first service began around daybreak with psalms of praise. The second, about mid-morning, involved a procession accompanied by psalmody through the streets of the city to a designated church. The late morning service began in this stational church, and was followed by a series of services centered on the Eucharist that lasted until late mid-afternoon. The day concluded with a final service of lamplighting. The participants in this daily liturgy, says Kavanagh, "over time, from Sunday to Sunday, from feast to feast, from year to year, would have found themselves steeped in God's word proclaimed, heard, preached, sung and celebrated to an extent we find difficult to imagine today."

Today's services, or "offices," are primarily celebrated by monastics, including oblates who "strive each day to pray some part of the Divine Office...as the circumstances in their lives permits." The first office of each day is the night office of Vigils, which some monasteries celebrate at 2:00 or 3:00 in the morning and others later in the early hours of the morning. It still has the character of a night watch and is frequently one of the longer offices of the day for just that reason. The second office is Lauds or, in some monasteries, Matins. This office celebrates the gift of a new day, the coming of light and our rising with Christ. These are two of the major offices, or "hours."

The next four are called the "little hours" -- Prime, Terce, Sext and None. Each of these also has its theme: Prime, prayed at about 6:00 was the deliberate start of the monastic day; Terce, celebrated at 9:00, focused on blessing, Spirit and joy; Sext, at noon, carried the dual theme of crisis and commitment; and None, at 3:00, acknowledged the beginning of the end and impermanence. Many monasteries have combined these into a daily Mass followed by noon prayer.

The seventh traditional office is Vespers, considered by many to be the most solemn of the day. It has its roots in Jewish synagogue worship and focuses on the lighting of the lamps and the making of one's peace with the day now ending.

(continued on page four)

Music in liturgy

From the early days of the church, music has been integral to our worship. Music can impart a sense of solemnity, beauty, joy or passion. Liturgical music enhances experiences of unity and sets the tone for a particular feast-day, ritual or sacrament.

We use music to nourish and strengthen our faith, to highlight scripture and to support the basic architecture of the rites. It relies on the language centers of the brain, but because music expresses feelings and meanings that are not words, the joy of music can move beyond words that can be so precise that we can begin theologizing instead of experiencing the presence of God. Music expresses the soul.

However, because music and singing are intended primarily to support the liturgy, they can never dominate. Music, speech and all the other arts must harmonize in the service of liturgical action. When any performance is used simply for its own sake or to draw attention to the artists themselves, these gifts can be destructive to the rituals of worship. Music that interferes with the movement of the worship ritual or that over-privileges a secondary element of the sacramental ritual or that is counter to the mood of the day or the occasion can also be more distracting than supportive.

We avoid those distractions not because we are against any particular form of music but because liturgical music is intended to set particular tones in worship, to sustain transitions in the movements of our rituals, to unify the voice of the congregation and to seek to give our best effort to God.

For that very reason, the music of the church is also governed by Canon law. Title II, Canon 6, "Of the Music of the Church," Section 1 reads as follows: "It shall be the duty of every Minister to see that music is used as an offering for the glory of God and to help the people in their worship in accordance with the Book of Common Prayer and as authorized by the Rubric or General Convention of this Church. To this end the Minister shall have final authority in the administration of matters pertaining to music. In fulfilling this responsibility the Minister shall seek assistance from persons skilled in music. Together they shall see that music is appropriate to the context in which it is used."

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The Elizabethan is published monthly by St. Elizabeth Episcopal Church. The deadline for articles is the fourth Friday of each month.

Articles, calendar items and ideas may be mailed or emailed to the addresses below or left in *The Elizabethan* box in the Parish Office.

St. Elizabeth Episcopal Church

Street 1005 SW 152nd Street

Address: Burien, WA 98166

Mailing PO Box 66579

Address: Burien, WA 98166

Phone: (206) 243-6844

Email: info@stelizburien.comcastbiz.net

Website: www.stelizabethburien.org



Rector: Father John Forman

Sr. Warden: Kirk Utley

Jr. Warden: Carolyn Terry

Treasurer: Linda Knutson

(continued from page two)

Vespers, which we call Evening Prayer in the Book of Common Prayer, frequently includes the *Phos Hilaron*, a beautiful prayer to Christ using the imagery of light, and the *Magnificat*, Mary's gracious song of praise to God for his goodness and wonders, or the *Nunc Dimittis*, the prayer that Simeon recited at the presentation of Jesus at the temple from the Gospel of Luke.

Compline completes the cycle by returning intentionally into the silence of the night. It can be thought of as a monastic lullaby and, in fact, is prayed in the privacy of the cloister in some monasteries. It is the only office that doesn't change with the church seasons, and its psalms and prayers prepare us to trustfully and peacefully enter the stillness of the night — even into death, if it should come in the night — with a clean conscience and with our spirits commended into God's hands and a final prayer to Mary.

All these offices have meaning because they are the time that we take to lay aside all other activities to give voice and heart to all of creation to reflect back the glory of the triune God. By giving the Opus Dei primacy in our own lives, shaping our day in community with others doing the same, we participate in God's great dance; we let the beauty and reality of God's creation, redemption and sustenance widen our hearts with grace and praise. This, according to Thomas Merton, "brings us in direct contact with Him whom we seek."

Using the Book of Common Prayer, Episcopalians can join with Anglican and other Christians throughout the world, to pray — whenever possible — the daily office, that is, Morning prayer, Noon prayer and Evening prayer during the day, and Compline at night. Some of us may be able to pray only in the morning or at night. Whatever our circumstances in life, we can seek to pray with the whole church in the pattern of daily prayer.

In fact, the 1979 BCP provides three versions of Morning prayer, three versions of Evening prayer, two versions of noon prayer and two versions of Compline. These are located in the front of the BCP because they are intended to be central practices for the Episcopalian way of being Christian in the world. You are always welcome to join us at Evening Prayer at St. Elizabeth on most Wednesday evenings at 5:30. (We do a spoken Mass on the last Wednesday of each month.)



New directories available

We have a new church directory. And, as happens in every church, there are already changes and updates. These will be incorporated in an updated directory later in the year. For now, here are some of the changes that you may want to note:

Elizabeth Binkley's email address:

Binkleek@plu.edu

Fr. Alwyn Hall's correct cell number is 206-898-9030

Brandon Hell's email address:

hellbj@plu.org

Ann Julin (she will provide an address soon)

206-819-3697

Anner2@comcast.net

The Rev. Robin Moore

15045 5th Ave SW #635

Burien, WA 98166

360-229-2194

Robinm4844@gmail.com

Jim Schumacher's email address:

jschumacher@cdirad.com

Ministers of Our Church

Cantors: Brandon Hell & Elizabeth Binkley

Fellowship opportunities

On the first Friday of each month, from 10 a.m. to noon, you are invited to come for "Coffee and Conversation" in the St John room. Sue Tierney and Donna Abell hosted the most recent gathering on June 1st .

These informal opportunities to get to know each other a little better will return beginning in September. (There will not be events in July and August.) Contact Janey Montgomery if you are interested in hosting a coffee in the fall. Usually two people share hosting duties: one arrives at about 9:30 to make the coffee and the other brings light treats or they can make other arrangements together. Newcomers to St. Elizabeth or friends are especially welcome!

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St. Elizabeth Episcopal Church

PO Box 66579

Burien, Washington 98166-0579



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“Within the best of us, there is some evil, and within the worst of us, there is some good. When we come to see this, we take a different attitude toward individuals...and when you come to the point that you look in the face of every person and see deep down within what religion calls ‘the image of God,’ you begin to love in spite of. No matter what the person does, you see God’s image there.” ~ Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.

Adult Formation:

Adult Formation classes are on hold through June and will return in July. We are doing some training on Sunday mornings in June for acolytes on Sunday, June 3rd at 9:00 in the sanctuary; readers at the same time on Sunday, June 10th and greeters on June 17th. Please come for the appropriate refresher if you are already serving in one or more of these ministries, or if you are interested in serving.

Also, watch this space for announcements about Tuesday classes with Fr. John Ferguson. He is preparing classes on the liturgical year and other topics to be offered later in the year. The Rev. Canon John will celebrate 46 years of ordination to the priesthood on the first Sunday of Advent this year and we are blessed with the knowledge, experience and love of God that he brings to this parish!