



Praying Shapes Believing: Encountering God in Prayer

By The Rev'd Vicki K. Hesse

In his book, “Praying Shapes Believing: A Theological Commentary,”^[1] Leonel Mitchell calls Episcopalians a “people of a prayer book.” He explores how we use the prayer book for our public services and how it is also the guide for our private prayer and the source of most of our theology (or “God-talk.” In Latin, this is expressed, “*lex orandi lex credendi.*”

Our prayer book fuels our talk with God. In beautifully written prayers, in finely crafted liturgy, and in formational language, we encounter God. Using the prayer book, we hold a long tradition that dates back to the early 200’s even while we find space to pray in our own context, in our own cosmic time.

We find this in the Morning Prayer and Evening Prayer services (BCP 75 and 115). This language is also found in the Daily Office of the Church (BCP 136-140) for individuals. In these prayer practices, pray-ers are in a community of Christians throughout the world who join in prayer at focal points of the day, in communion with fellow Christians everywhere. Historically, the daily practice of consecrating the first and last hours of the day can be traced back to the Christian community of the apostles, and even earlier, to traditional Jewish practices of reciting the *Shema* (the verse, “Hear, O Israel...” in Deuteronomy 6:4-7) when one rises in the morning and retires at night.

At Christ Church Grosse Pointe, we say Morning and Evening Prayer every week day at 8:30am and 5:00pm in the chapel. These classic monastic offices are non-ceremonious, meditative and wholly prayerful – while in community. We begin the office with “Lord, open our lips,” which invokes the response, “And our mouth shall proclaim your praise” and we join the monastic tradition of breaking the “Great Silence” which lasted from the end of Compline the previous night. This phrase is no less

^[1] Mitchell, Leonel L, Morehouse Publishing, Harrisburg, PA , 1985



appropriate in our modern context, for it states that only God can enable us to pray. And in doing so, we encounter God.

Throughout the offices, there are places of silence: between verses of the psalm reading, during the intercessory prayers, after the readings and between collects. These silences are opportunities to be silent before God, together, reminding us that we really do have nothing to say. We simply listen for the voice of God, who will pray in us.

You are invited to experience our daily office prayers, for one or the other services during the week. Like the Sunday services, it may take a few times to “get the feel” of the service. And soon you will find that God continues to call you to prayer – in community – for sacred encounters with the Divine.