

It seems every time I turn around I see another church advertising for a musician for a praise band. Now, I'm an electric blues musician and I love to play in bands, but it always brings to mind comments I've heard for years from people who say worship should be "*relevant*," that it should "*meet their needs*."

“If you want a religion to make you feel comfortable, I certainly don't recommend Christianity”
~ C.S.Lewis

Fr. John Matusiak of the Orthodox Church in America has a great response for those statements. He calls such worship "*man-centered*" worship. Fr. John suggests the focus here is on how God affects "*my life*" and what "*I get out of worship*." I believe he's right, because I've heard these comments too many times to discount their relationship to where the person puts the real focus of worship. Here their focus is on "ME"... what "I" want...fitting "MY" expectations..."ME, ME, ME". The script here is that, "*I'm so important that worshipping God has to fit in with the way 'I' want to do it.*" As with many facets of our society today, the person becomes the most important factor here and God has to take a back seat. This is self-focused, not God-focused.

In the Anglican tradition, we take a view very similar to that expressed by Fr. John in

describing Orthodox worship. Anglican worship is not a matter of personal taste. When Archbishop Cranmer was compiling the first Book of Common Prayer, he wasn't really concerned with making the worship relevant for the people of the 16th century. He was concerned that the worship was scriptural and God-centered.

Fr. John says that God is the only one we should be concerned with pleasing in our worship and I think he's spot on. "Entertainment" worship might be amusing, but it only lets us experience worship from our own limited, narrow view. It comes from the "ME" and not from God. Let's face it: our view is not always correct. In fact, as Jesus often points out, our views can be quite flawed.

Entertainment worship does not necessarily force us to confront our sin, our fallenness, and those things which make us uncomfortable. Instead of centering on God, it substitutes "Top 40" music and a motivational speech....it gives us something that isn't too difficult to swallow.

The fact is that worship is not designed for us, but for God. It is our Lord whom we worship and not ourselves. We should care less about what pleases us and more about what pleases Him. Fr. Matusiak put it well when he says, "*...we are called to worship 'in Spirit and Truth,' as we read in Scripture; that we are called to partake of the Body and Blood of Christ 'as often as you come together' lest, as we read in the words of Our Lord Himself in the Gospel of Saint John, we have no life in us; that we are to 'lay aside all earthly*

cares'....that we are called to transform our fallen human existence and unworthiness by bringing it into the very presence of God Himself--in His Kingdom, not ours--and meeting God 'where He is,' rather than where we are or where we would like Him to be."

Our worship is God-focused. Just read the Eucharistic rite in the 1928 Book of Common Prayer. Everything we do is grounded in scripture. Everything we say has a focus on God. When the focus is on us, it speaks to our fallen nature and need for God's love and forgiveness, as well as our need for salvation-- forgiveness and salvation He provides through the sacrifice of His Son. Rather than a weekly shuffling of "off-the-cuff" service pieces and parts, our Eucharist is the same every Sunday, completely grounded in scripture and focused on the creator, not His creation. Paul tells us that Christ is the same "...yesterday, today, and tomorrow." The Trinity is unchanging and the key is to understand that our liturgy must reflect that truth.

There are a variety of liturgies today in the church. The Roman Catholics have their rites; the Orthodox have the Liturgies of St. Basil and St. John Chrysostom; and we traditional American Anglicans have the 1928 Book of Common Prayer, the Anglican Missal, and the Anglican Service Book. What do these liturgies share? They are God-focused, they reflect the unchanging nature of the Trinity, aligning with the ageless faith of two millennia. They don't move and shift as contemporary tastes change and it's

a good thing because we can see that contemporary tastes aren't always God-centered. Contemporary tastes don't reflect God, but they do reflect selfish humans. Anglicans have witnessed this trend most recently with changes to liturgy that ignore and diminish the nature of the Trinity.

Liturgy is an external event that focuses on internal faith. The Eucharist is an outward and visible sign of an inward and spiritual grace. We learned that in our catechism. It is the experience of Christ's sacrifice and promise of His resurrection and our salvation. Maybe that's where the differences lie.

In some other churches there is no continuity with respect to what is preached when and how. There is no continuity to "liturgy" so it can change a little every week. Some of the current vernacular among the folks who are involved with this type of worship includes calling worship "doing church." They'll say, "there are several ways to do church..." I find that phrase odd. It suggests that worship is something we "do" as though it's a flexible experience that needs to bend to the interests and desires of humans. We traditional Anglicans, don't "do" church. We aren't flexible with our Sunday worship. We follow a liturgical calendar to teach doctrine and glorify God through the scripture and sacraments. Each season of the church calendar is important because it teaches us something about our faith. It's the same every year. If you pray Morning and Evening prayer and attend

Mass on Sunday, you will have read the entire Bible in one year and will have gone through a focused "lesson plan" on the Christian faith, a lesson plan that is God-focused.

Despite what society might think today, enjoyment is not the sole purpose of worship. Knowing and understanding God brings joy, not our personal likes and dislikes about worship. As Fr. John says, "Ultimately, those...who define 'good worship' by their personal tastes or interests are not in a position to fully understand the Liturgy, even though they may 'enjoy' the experience." To understand the liturgy is to move away from yourself and focus on God. Understand what He wants from you and how He wants you to worship Him. To ensure the act of worship reflects the inward and spiritual... and God.

We have the constancy of the Prayer Book which not only guides our worship, but ensures its continuity and orthodoxy. It focuses on what is truly important: God, versus how WE want things and our selfish enjoyment. Linking us to catholic Christians of the ages, it is beautiful, reverential, dignified-- ensuring we are on the right path in our faith. It doesn't let us get distracted by worldly desires and thoughts, but brings us to God and the salvation His Son has given us through His passion and death on the cross. In fact, in the experience of the Holy Communion we might just find ourselves asking whether we're on earth or in heaven and that is the most relevant thing of all.

WHY WE WORSHIP THIS WAY

Anglican Church
SAINT ANTHONY'S

10811 Staples Mill Road Glen Allen Virginia 23060 (804) 248-8940 glenallenanglicans.com
Fr. Thierry Hakpon, Priest Holy Communion begins at 10am Sunday.