



St Luke's in the City

150 years - 2009

Celebrating at the Crossroads

6th Sunday of Easter

27 April 2008

Liturgy as Transformation

Today's reflection is part one of a series on the liturgy

GATHERING: Entering the Presence

Pause at the threshold of the sacred space. Bow low.

Prepare for fresh encounter with the Holy One.

Ann Lewin

THIS is the first of a series of reflections about the liturgy, in particular the liturgy as we have come to do it at St Luke's. The title of the series signals that I have an overarching theme in mind. It is common for Eucharist, by whatever name it may be given in different places and parts of the church, to be regarded as something we receive on a Sunday morning which will top us up for the week ahead – as in the expression 'receiving my communion'. This is only half of the truth.

First and foremost, the eucharist is the making of the new creation, the new humanity, by participation in the death and resurrection of Christ. This means that long before we enter the building the liturgy is beginning, as Orthodox theology emphasises. The Orthodox theologian Alexander Schmemmann refers to this as 'The Sacrament of the Assembly'. Even to gather is itself a sacramental act! The Greek Scriptures (New Testament) word which is translated into English as 'church' is *ἐκκλησία* *ecclesia*, which means 'a gathering', 'an assembly'. The gathering is Eucharistic – its purpose is accomplished in the 'breaking of the bread'. From the very beginning the 'assembly', the 'eucharist' and the 'church' are one and the same. The church is the gathering of the people, which is the Body of Christ – taken, blessed, broken and given for the life of the world.

The Gathering is the first liturgical act of the eucharist, its foundation and beginning. The Gathering commences with our intention to be with each other at the Table of grace. The Gathering begins as we rise in the morning, continues as we enter the physical structure of the building, as we risk encounter with the Divine, and as we encounter others. We are coming into the Presence. The manner in which we gather sets the tone for everything that follows. If we do not embody an hospitable presence in the Gathering, then nothing that follows can make up for that. If we do not fall down in silence before God in the Gathering then everything that follows is likely to be shallow.

Thus, our first action is to both greet those around us as though they are actually our sisters and brothers, and at the same time to 'pause at the threshold', to surrender ourselves into the unfathomable silent depths of the Divine. In practical terms, this means we greet each other (especially the stranger and those we find difficult!) outside, then enter inside in silence. We bow to the Altar of Christ. We bow to each

other, the living Body of Christ. Now we are ready to undertake our sacramental role as the People of God, the ecclēsia, the Body of Christ!

Fr David Moore