

Discussion Questions

Lesson One: The Daily Office

1. In praying the Daily Office, we participate in an ancient tradition and join with Christians all around the world who are praying the same form. How might this experience expand our horizons of prayer beyond ourselves and deepen our relationships with God and with one another?
2. Read *A Prayer of St. Chrysostom* and compare the two versions on pages 59 and 102 of *The Book of Common Prayer*. What does this prayer say to you? Which version do you prefer and why?
3. Think about your own habit of daily prayer. Are there ways to improve or expand this practice?

Lesson Two: The Liturgical Year

1. What might it look like to orient all of our time and our lives around the birth and resurrection of Jesus instead of around other things? How might our day-to-day lives change?
2. What is your favorite liturgical season and why?
3. How can all the possibilities of observance -- seasons, feasts, fasts, and days of special devotion -- deepen our relationship with God?

Lesson Three: Holy Week and Easter

1. Is there a service during Holy Week that is difficult for you? Why is it difficult? What might this discomfort say to you about your life of faith?
2. Jesus commands us to wash one another's feet and to remember him with bread and wine -- in the same passage. Why do you think we partake of Holy Eucharist weekly but foot washing only occasionally?
3. Which moment from the liturgies of Holy Week is most powerful and important to you, personally? Why is that moment particularly important?

Lesson Four: The Burial Office

1. If we focus only on the Christian hope of resurrection, then we deny the reality of grief when we lose the ones we love. If we focus only on grief, then we ignore the promise of the Christian hope of eternal life. How does the burial liturgy balance hope and grief? How do we do this in our own lives?
2. Heaven as described in the Bible is strikingly different from the idea of heaven often portrayed in popular culture. How does the Bible's description of Heaven challenge, comfort, or unsettle you?
3. Have you planned your own funeral? If you have, what is it like? If you haven't, why not?

The Takeaway

Lesson One: The Daily Office

When Cranmer put together The Book of Common Prayer (BCP), he wanted to make sure that the prayer of the church belonged to all the people and not just to clergy and monastics. One way he did this was to take the complicated life of prayer engaged by monastics and simplifying the prayers into Morning Prayer and Evening Prayer. The Daily Office is available in Rite One and Rite Two versions at the beginning of the BCP. Cranmer himself wrote many of the prayers in Rite One. They are beautiful and poetic, but Rite 2 is more contemporary and easier to understand. Praying the Daily Office regularly steeps us in prayer and scripture. If you do the Daily Office each day for two years, you will have read most of the Bible and all of the psalms once a month. The services are very scripture-based. They begin with psalms. Then lessons from OT and NT. We respond to each with a canticle: a song or poem from scripture. We say the Apostles' Creed, reminding ourselves of the faith we've inherited. We pray for the church, for the world, and for ourselves. We never pray the daily office alone. Someone else somewhere in the world is saying the service at the same time. The experience is global and timeless. The options involved can make the Daily Office complicated, so you might begin with daily Devotions for Individuals and Families (p 136 of BCP). They have prayers for morning, noontime, evening, and bedtime. They're meant to be used by individuals and families at home. They're short and help build a habit of daily prayer.

Lesson Two: The Liturgical Year

In the front of the BCP, there's a church calendar: the way the church tells time. Christian time orients around the great gifts that God has given us. It focuses on Christmas (Jesus' birth) and Easter (Jesus' resurrection). These two days are the compass points around which everything else focuses. Our church year begins in Advent: 4 weeks before Christmas. The church year has 7 major seasons: Advent, Christmas, Epiphany, Lent, Holy Week, Easter (50 days), and the season after Pentecost which we call "ordinary time," not because it's ordinary, but because the weeks are counted with ordinal numbers for a long time: the first Sunday after Pentecost, the second Sunday after Pentecost, etc. These seasons, like nature's seasons, give rhythm to our year. Advent and Lent are times of waiting and preparation. There are days of celebration: Christmas, Easter, Pentecost, the feast of the Ascension, Trinity Sunday, All Saints' Sunday, and the Feast of the Epiphany. We also have days of special observance and days of optional observance -- other, smaller feasts that we observe throughout the year. According to the BCP calendar, every Sunday is a feast of our Lord. Every 7 days, we celebrate a major feast -- a big deal; a big day of celebration. Our church year has room for all ways of encountering God in Christ -- times of joy and sadness and preparation. We don't just pick one. We see Jesus as a baby in the manger and on the way to his crucifixion. We see Jesus the good shepherd and Jesus post-resurrection on the road to Emmaus. We are called to witness all of these times as Christians.

The Takeaway (Continued)

Lesson Three: Holy Week and Easter

Holy Week is the week that leads up to Easter Day. It's the heart of our liturgical life together as Christians; the most important week of the year. When we celebrate Holy Week together, we remember events that happened with Jesus in his life, in his death, and in his resurrection. The week starts with Palm Sunday. We typically bless palm branches and pass them to the congregation, and there's some kind of procession – around the church or block – and people sing joyous hymns and remember the triumph of Jesus' entry into Jerusalem. We remember the people who thought Jesus would deliver them from their oppressor. We read the passion gospel, the story of Jesus' suffering and death, which turns our attention to the sorrow of Holy Week. M-W the readings draw us into the story. Thursday starts the three holy day (the Triduum); Maundy Thursday, Good Friday, and Holy Saturday. On Maundy Thursday, we often wash one another's feet, and we remember the first Eucharist. On Good Friday we again read the passion gospel. We venerate the cross – a large cross is brought into the church, and people touch it or kiss it – remembering that this horrible instrument was the instrument of grace. In many churches, it's customary to receive communion, but from the reserved sacrament because we don't celebrate the Eucharist on this desolate day. We celebrate Easter Eve on Holy Saturday, at Easter Vigil. The service begins in darkness, and then we start a fire. We listen to the salvation stories by candlelight. We celebrate baptisms and celebrate the first Eucharist of Easter, with joy and bells and noise and celebration. The three holy days are one continuous liturgy – we are not blessed and sent forth until Easter Vigil. Then we come back Easter morning to celebrate Easter day.

Lesson Four: The Burial Office

One of the ways that we mark time is through our lives. Baptism begins our life in Christ. The burial office is how we mark the end of our earthly lives. The BCP calls it The Burial of the Dead. Sometimes we try to think of the service as a celebration of the life of one who has died, but that's not how Anglicans approach it. We celebrate, not someone's life who has died, but instead the fact that that person, through baptism, has been united with Christ, and in death is transitioning to another chapter of their eternal life in Jesus. It's sad, but it's also an Easter service. We have hope and confidence that this person has been redeemed by Jesus Christ. It's like a normal Sunday Eucharist in some ways. It's customary for the priest to welcome the body into the church with prayers. As the body is walked down the aisle, we read scripture to remind us that in Christ, we are made alive. The lessons focus on death and resurrection. We pray for the deceased, for loved ones, and for the church. There's communion. Then we have the commendation. The priest goes to the body and says prayers to commend that person into God's eternal care. We cannot take care of that person anymore, so we commend this person to be cared for eternally by God. We proceed to the place where the body will be buried. The priest says the committal. Until the day of the resurrection of the body when we are made whole again by the power of Jesus, our bodies go back to the earth, from which we were made.

Walk in Love Two:

Marking Time

With Scott Gunn and Melody Shobe

Participant's Guide

Welcome!

Looking for a concise, accessible explanation of Episcopal faith and beliefs?

The Revs. Scott Gunn and Melody Shobe have given us an incredible resource. In this course these veteran Episcopal clerics unpack the basic beliefs and practices of their tradition. This is the second of five courses and explains how Episcopalians mark time. Here are the titles of their four video presentations:

1. The Daily Office
2. The Liturgical Year
3. Holy Week and Easter
4. The Burial Office

This course is based on the companion book *Walk in Love* and completion of all five courses makes students eligible for a ChurchNext Certificate in Episcopal Basics.

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