

FROM

IN THE RUINS OF THE CHURCH

By R. R. RENO

The Daily Office

Will not God grant justice to his chosen ones who cry to him day and night?

Luke 18:7

Open the *Book of Common Prayer* to its first rites. There you will find a demand and promise of remarkable ambition: the unending cycle of daily prayer. The features of this daily prayer epitomize the spiritual drama of the Christian life, both in goal and in focus, for the ambition to mark each day grows out of a faith in Jesus Christ as the Alpha and Omega. We are to dwell in him, and to do so each day must be brought captive to Christ.

We should not imagine that this ambition is optional or peripheral to the Christian life. Daily communal prayer, or what the Anglican tradition (following the lead of the larger Western tradition) calls the Daily Office, serves as an engine of intimacy. In order to explain this function, I want to consider both the basic forms and verbal details of the Daily Office as it is currently available in the *Book of Common Prayer*.

An opening sentence for Morning Prayer expresses the need for daily prayer: "Watch, for you know not when the master of the house will come, in the evening, or at midnight, or at cockcrow, or in the morning, lest he come suddenly and find you asleep" (Mark 13:35-36). We

are warned, rightly, against our tendency to sleep-walk through the life of faith. Prayer morning and evening responds to the exhortations found in the book of Isaiah: "Awake, awake, put on your strength, O Zion! Put on your beautiful garments" (52:1). The Daily Office stands as the primary means by which the church might make us wakeful and watchful. It is in this sense an order of vigilance. The demand of the Daily Office echoes the word of Jesus who is speaking not only to Peter but also directly to us when he asks, "Are you asleep? Could you not keep awake one hour?" (Mark 14:37).

Yet this order is more than a spur or goad; it is also a consummating celebration, for the master of the house has come. "Who can fail to do you homage, Lord, and sing the praises of your name?" asks a canticle for Morning Prayer, itself drawn from the book of Revelation (15:4). (A canticle means, literally, a "song"; however, in the liturgical tradition, a canticle is a song or prayer, other than a psalm, usually drawn from the Bible, that serves as a regular element of worship.) The sweet honey of the Psalms nourishes, and the diadems of prayer, taken from Scripture and sanctified by centuries of use, glorify God. To awaken in prayer is to put on strength. For this reason the Daily Office is not only watchful and vigilant but receptive and doxological. The purposes of the Daily Office are as pentecostal as adventine, as consummating as expectant. Awakened in prayer, we receive that which we hear. Eyes open, we do not just see; we get up and go with Jesus (cf. Mark 14:42). Our minds and hearts walk down the pathways of ancient prayers, many of which defined the boundaries of Jesus' own religious practice in the first century. Thus do we live in Christ, and he in us.

That we should be encouraged by the *Book of Common Prayer* to allow ourselves to be awakened by and absorbed into the fixed forms of its daily prayer says a great deal about how Anglicanism as a whole conceives of our being taken captive by Christ. Indeed the shaping method of the Daily Office marks the outlines of a doctrine of the Holy Spirit, embodying in practice what is often only partially expressed in Anglican theology. For the mission of the Spirit is to bring Christ to us and us to Christ. The Holy Spirit is the agent of intimacy, the divine match-maker. The ambition of the Daily Office is, then, a direct reflection of the ambition of God's redemptive purpose. Based upon recitation and repetition, the routine of daily prayer shapes us into a determinate, focused way of discipleship, a way fitting to those who would follow the narrow way of the cross. In this way, our lives are drawn into the obedience that is the unbreakable and intimate bond of the Son to the Father.

For this reason Morning and Evening Prayer should be our source for reflection on the concrete and doxological pneumatology that is, I

think, the greatest strength of Anglicanism.¹ It is much more reliable than all the contemporary loose talk about the Holy Spirit and the Gnostic dreams of modern theologians. We do well to set aside our books of Anglican theology for a moment and learn from the Daily Office, for it is a discipline far older, far more reliable, than fevered images of "incarnational" or "inclusive" or "nondogmatic" Anglicanism currently abroad. Indeed the Daily Office and its path into the mystery of Christ is far older and more reliable than Anglicanism itself.

Encompassing and Apostolic

The ongoing and daily cycle of prayer is as old as the Judaism from which Christianity sprang. Within the Psalter, the prayer book of the Old Testament, we hear the author of the 119th psalm declare, "Seven times a day I praise you" (v. 164). Whether or not ancient Judaism followed a strict sevenfold pattern, prayer ordered by the hours of the day was common to synagogue life during the life of Jesus. The author of the Gospel of Mark highlights the hours of watchfulness in the verses mentioned above. We are to watch in the evening and at midnight, at cockcrow and at dawn. The imperative to watch is not generic; rather, Mark's watchfulness is keyed to just that ordered cycle of prayer that, however demarcated and numbered, constitutes the watchfulness of Israel.

The early church did not rebel against the encompassing ambition of a day marked by prayer. To the contrary, the Acts of the Apostles records that the baptized attended the temple services "day by day." The fire of the pentecostal spirit leads directly into a routine of worship that praises God (see Acts 2:43-47), and so the early followers of Jesus never tired of the daily round of prayer. They wished to draw near to the Lord, to treasure up his commandments so that they might be written on the tablets of their hearts (see Prov. 7:1-3). Thus did the early church feed on the patterns and practices of daily prayer as an infant upon the milk of her mother.

Practiced in many different ways in early Christianity, daily prayer took on a formal structure in Western monasticism. It was ordered by seven "hours," which we know by the names Lauds, Prime, Tierce, Sext, None, Evensong, and Compline. This pattern of prayer, called the Divine or Daily Office, constituted the work of the monk. However important field and winery might be for the body, scriptorium and library for the mind, the sevenfold marking of the day in gathered prayer defined the monastic life to which St. Benedict gave his *Rule*. To the extent that monasticism nurtured the dominant spiritual and intellectual currents

in Western Christianity, the Daily Office also defined the church as a whole. Indeed nonmonastic clergy were encouraged to perform various abbreviated forms of the Daily Office, and breviaries of all sorts proliferated throughout the Middle Ages. So fundamental was the encompassing framework of daily prayer that rebellions against the dominant Benedictine model of monastic life never questioned the necessity of the Daily Office. Mendicant Dominicans and Franciscans renounced the cloister, but they did not renounce the discipline of the hours. No matter how much the *devotio moderna* of the late Middle Ages deviated from the monastic ideal, the day remained marked by an order of prayer.

The sixteenth-century production of the *Book of Common Prayer* did not create a new Daily Office. Instead the work was primarily editorial. The component parts of the seven-hour Daily Office were ordered around the two foci of matins and evensong, already emphasized in ancient practice. The morning and evening hours were expanded through the addition of elements from the other hours of the day, and then the resulting compendia were reduced by eliminating repetitions. The present form of the Daily Office is largely unchanged from this sixteenth-century shift from seven to two liturgical "hours."

The most recent revision of the *Book of Common Prayer* has added orders for Noonday and Compline, which distantly echo monastic practice. Furthermore, there have been alterations in rubrics, modifications of language, and provision of additional canticles. Whether one judges these changes wise or foolish, necessary or superfluous, across revisions recent and remote the Daily Office of Morning and Evening Prayer remains strikingly continuous in logic and purpose. The words of prayer are drawn from Scripture or from the ancient liturgical memory of the church. Therefore both in form and content the Daily Office is fully loaded with the weight of apostolic practice.

Because the method of the Daily Office is apostolic, its encompassing ambition may be received as a gift rather than a burden. Here the word *apostolic* is not a synonym for *scriptural*. Our baptismal promise is drawn from Acts 2:42: "They devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and fellowship, to the breaking of the bread and the prayers." The New Testament serves as an indispensable form of apostolic teaching, the polestar by which to navigate both the Old Testament and our own times. Without doubt the apostolic witness finds its center of gravity here. However, this apostolic teaching is linked with fellowship, the breaking of the bread, and the prayers. The oral, and then written, record of Jesus and of the origins of an ordered community of discipleship is set within a form of life marked by moral and ritual observances. Thus our faith must not only return again and again to the canon of Scripture; it must also lead us into an ever-deeper immersion in the prayer

and practice of the faithful who have gone before. We must reread their testimony and dwell in their form of life.

For this reason we cannot view the prayer book and its order of Morning and Evening Prayer simply as a human tradition that we might enjoy or alter according to present need. Thomas Cranmer did not consolidate the sevenfold Divine Office in order to reassure those fearful of change. He did so because he wished to be faithful to his baptismal promise. He wished to continue in the apostles' teaching, fellowship, and prayers. Retaining the language and logic of inherited prayer was for Cranmer a decisive way to tether the faith and practice of the English Church to the apostles, to the faithful in Jerusalem who were going to the temple day by day. Cranmer's goal was to secure the deepest and most fundamental form of "apostolic succession": to pray as have those who have come before us.

The received order of Morning and Evening Prayer does no less in our own equally volatile times. Its apostolic continuity releases us from the fear that in our ambition to watch and wait, receive and glorify, we are unawares being submerged under pious illusions. These ancient forms tether us to Jesus Christ rather than the passing fads of our age. Visibly connected to ancient practice, the Daily Office has a power that rests in the holiness of words and prayers sanctified by the blood of the martyrs and freighted with centuries of faithful use. The apostolic weight of these formulations makes it a blessing to be driven and drawn by such a power.

Impressive and Expressive

If we say that the Daily Office is encompassing in ambition and apostolic in origin, then we should say that it is impressive in effect. Unlike baptism, this regular pattern of recitation and listening does not project us into a complex ritual enactment of birth and transformation. The extraordinary way the eucharistic liturgy engages us as both originating agents and passive recipients is absent. To be sure, the Daily Office involves birth and transformation, activity and passivity. Our recitations of psalm and canticle are verbal enactments that make the Word of God a living force. Our listening to a sequence of readings from Scripture is a hearing and harkening that both gives birth to faith and transforms how we understand our lives. Nonetheless, the range is narrow. The ambience is verbal; the Daily Office is ears and voice, not mouth and taste, forehead and touch. But what is lost in range is gained in intensity. The effect of daily prayer is highly focused, and with focus comes force. As Richard Hooker noted against critics who believed that ordered

prayer distances us from the gospel, the narrow constraints of daily prayer, fixed in content, is "imprinted with much more ease in all men's memories."² The words press upon us again and again with relentless force, and as a consequence our souls are given apostolic form.

The narrowness of the Daily Office is plain for the eye to see. It is dominated by recitations of canticles and psalms. In Western monastic practice, the gathered community recited the entire Psalter each week. When they compressed the seven-hour office into the two rites of Morning and Evening Prayer, the sixteenth-century Reformers constructed a sequence of psalms keyed to a monthly cycle. (This sequence of recitation is preserved in the Psalter printed in the prayer book. See the headings that run from "First Day: Morning Prayer" to "Thirtieth Day: Evening Prayer.") The current lectionary for the Daily Office organizes the Psalter in a seven-week sequence. Whether once a week or across seven weeks, this cyclical repetition of psalms is decisive. The purpose is unequivocal: the psalms are to become so intimate to us that they come to constitute our primary language of prayer.

The same holds true for the canticles that punctuate the Daily Office. They are largely drawn from Psalms, and from other portions of Scripture that echo the petitionary and doxological patterns of the psalms. Morning Prayer opens with a compound petition that explains the intent behind this repetition. "Lord, open our lips and our mouths shall proclaim your praise." That praise is "of the Lord" in senses both genitive and possessive. The psalms and canticles are praise of him, and they are words he enunciated in his own voice; they are his praise given to us for our use. The Scriptures were on the lips of Jesus, and so might they be on our lips morning and night. Our recitations, then, return to the Lord the very word he gives to us, and as the canticles cut deep channels in our memories through constant use, the circuit of gift, reception, and thanksgiving closes. What is given to us by him becomes the fit means for giving thanks to him. In all this, the purpose is impressive. Our religious imaginations are stamped with the scriptural patterns of the canticles. In repetition we are absorbed, shaped.

For those of us shackled to a culture of personal originality and expressive spontaneity, the repetitive impress can seem overwhelming. We can resist the Daily Office and its tight mold, thinking the recitations a replacement of the inner promptings of our own religious feelings by the ancient insights of the psalmist. We can rebel against words frozen in the fixed canon of Scripture. We can fear the narrowness of this way of daily prayer. However misguided, this response is at least accurate in its discernment of the doxological pneumatology of the Daily Office. There can be little doubt that the repetitions ensure that the very words of our apostolic inheritance find their way into our souls and, once there,

come to dominate. The Daily Office is in this sense the womb of our new life in Christ. It gives us our religious imagination, our verbal patterns of prayer, our very ability to articulate need and joy. If we regret this, then we regret one of the great gifts of the Holy Spirit: the voice of faith.

If we resist this impress because of a love of novelty or rebellion against fixed form, we should beware. For the method of the Daily Office rises out of a central truth about how the Holy Spirit brings us to Christ. In Christ the good news of God's love takes the fleshly and determinate form of the man Jesus of Nazareth. He is fixed to a rigid pattern of events. The vocation and prophecies of Israel define his life. His suffering is foretold. His life comes to the bitter boundary of death so that the Scriptures might be fulfilled. In faith, the Holy Spirit brings us new life, but not an uncertain or open newness. Instead new life in Christ is always found through drawing near the defined and delimited man Jesus of Nazareth. The power of the Holy Spirit brings life, because that power allows us to stand with the centurion who looked upon Jesus as he died upon the cross and to say, "Truly this man was God's Son!" (Mark 15:39).

Therefore whatever we might want for ourselves—room and scope for experimentation, the freedom to shape our own destinies, reversible choices and tentative commitments—the way of Jesus Christ winnows. He ventures all in the narrow way of the cross. The Daily Office trains our lives of prayer toward the same intensive concentration. The repetitions bind us to a narrow way. For just this reason, and not because of any particular religious genius or symbolic virtuosity found in the psalms or canticles, the cycles of repetition are crucial. The relentless givenness and ever-increasing familiarity of the central elements of the Daily Office shape us; we are given the impress of a way given and not chosen. Thus does the Holy Spirit work upon us.

This work is all-important, for as we draw near to him, he comes to dwell in us. Here the doxological dimension is central, not ancillary. The psalms train us in the very prayer of Jesus, for it is to the Psalter that he turns on the cross. As we are absorbed into the Psalter, our religious imaginations are fused to his. Just as important is the way the repetitions of psalm and canticle shape us to find our way forward through rather than around, above, or underneath the given form of the scriptural witness. We say these words of Scripture again and again, and this guides us to look again into the apostolic witness rather than elsewhere. And the effect is significant, for when we look up from the Psalter and cast our eyes on the cross, this life of prayer has trained us to look into the fathomless depths of his crucified form rather than compulsively searching for brighter, more pleasant alternatives. The impress of the fixed and given forms of daily prayer prepares us for the narrowness of

the way. We do not shape that good news to fit what we imagine to be our own spiritual needs. We are shaped by the good news of Christ.

We do not fall into the way of Christ up to Golgotha with fatalistic abandonment. We retain our distinctive place and mission in the world; we continue as agents in the world. His impress, like the impress of psalm and canticle, shapes us as persons marked for his service. In his Spirit we are called, but we are also sent. Once we have received the impress of psalm and canticle, passion and cross, there is no limit to the degree to which our lives, our world, may be loaded with the electrical charge of his determinate form. The Daily Office is guided by this truth. As we move from the repetitive center of the Daily Office, its cycles of psalms and canticles, we become less passive recipients of the divine impress, less raw material molded by recitation. We shift from abandoning ourselves to fixed form to receiving him within the unique and diverse structures of our lives. The expressive mission of faith begins to take form in us.

Listening to Scripture is the first step in this shift. Here we find ourselves more active. This seems counterintuitive. Sitting to listen silently to Scripture appears to be more passive than participatory. But this confuses behavior with consequence. One cannot think, analyze, react, and respond while standing and reciting. Speaking words aloud, we give ourselves over to the task of enunciation. Little is left in reserve. In contrast, the very passivity of listening makes room for all manner of inner response. Listening takes little effort, and as a result, a great deal of scope is left for deliberation.

In this space for engagement, we are gathered into Christ in the uniqueness and individuality of our lives. The two-year cycle of lectionary readings from Scripture keeps us off balance. The psalms and canticles become familiar, but the diversity and heterogeneity of Scripture continually strike new and discordant notes. The historical books of the Old Testament and the narratives of the Gospels present us with words very different in genre and function from the visions of the prophets and the exhortations of St. Paul. The voice of judgment, command, and condemnation; the calls for repentance and amendment of life; the promise of new life; the vision of God's consummating judgment—the voice of Scripture is a seminal word that we receive in our own individuality and distinctiveness.

In these ways our sitting and listening is a moment of learning and discernment. We may feel the shock of relevance in St. Paul's admonitions to the Corinthians two millennia past or in Amos's denunciations still more ancient. Our listening may be a moment of intense personal emotion in which the uniqueness of our life crosses into the world of Scripture. Our grief over the recent death of a loved one intersects with

the story of Jesus' raising of the child, and the resultant thoughts can never be anticipated. Thus where the words of the psalms and canticles live in us with familiarity, no matter how well we know the Scriptures, the sheer breadth of this gracious word lives with an ever-new impact. We might say the Venite (the canticle drawn from Psalm 95 that is known by its first word in Latin) numerous times in a single week; it becomes a center of gravity around which our changing life orbit. Thomas's question to Jesus, David's confrontation with Goliath, the prophetic words of Isaiah come only every other year. They intersect with our life. This yields an active moment: we must discern and decide about what we have heard.

The potentially disruptive, unsettling effect of listening to Scripture in the Daily Office warrants the return to recitation in the most repeated canticle of all, the Apostles' Creed. This we say every time. No matter how deeply personal and highly individualized might be our engagement with God's Word, we rise to say the Apostles' Creed. The ancient formula is a synopsis of our trinitarian faith. God is like *this*, and just so are we blessed. Here the closed circuit of psalm and canticle is reestablished. Shocked dislocation, personal insight, and interpretive novelty may characterize our listening to Scripture. But these shards of individuality are reenrolled into the apostolic and determinate form of our common Christian life. The Word of God that has intersected our lives with seeming serendipity just moments before ("My goodness, St. Paul is talking to *me!*") now dwells within us with the permanence of the One who suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified, died, and was buried.

The Doxological Structure of Mission

The purpose of the Daily Office is not to rest quiescent in the truth of the triune God. God's Word is seminal, and the expressive moment has enduring significance. The Comforter comes to us with reassurance but also with mission. The Daily Office concludes on this note. In the prayers that mark the final portion of both Morning and Evening Prayer we do more than listen, discern, and digest. We inhabit the given form of our life in Christ with fullness. These prayers, called "collects" in the Anglican tradition (the name comes from the original Latin term, *collecta*, used to describe short, concise prayers that punctuate larger elements of public worship), the Daily Office guides us toward the fullness of this expressive dimension of our faith. In that sense the prayers render us. They are the moments in which we begin to let out that which has been formed in us by psalm and canticle, that which has awakened in us through hearing the Scriptures.

The beginning of this structured expression of faith is the Lord's Prayer. The most familiar moment in the Daily Office because most repeated, the Lord's Prayer is the hinge on which the extraordinary process of giving ourselves over to fixed repetition *turns into* moments of intense subjectivity and personal involvement. The Lord's Prayer is both impressive and expressive, and each to an extreme degree. Ubiquitous in liturgies, repeated on countless occasions, far from numbing us, the Lord's Prayer is very often the first prayer to our lips in moments of private trial and anguish. It is said by all and frequently, yet with personal conviction and conveying a diversity of individual concerns.

Indeed so personal, so intimate is this most common of prayers that no amount of lobbying by professional liturgists and exhortation by progressive pastors can dislodge the archaic language from the minds and lips of the faithful. "Trespases" may seem awkward, even false to the true Christian meaning of sin, but through uncounted recitations this word has become loaded with lifetimes of our regrets and failures. We do not say "Forgive us our trespases" as if it were for the first time, fumbling over the meaning of the word. We use the Lord's Prayer against the background of our very vivid understanding of the meaning and scope of our sinfulness. The remarkable tenacity of the old form of the Lord's Prayer testifies to the subjective and individual, the personal dimension, which is brought forth by repetition of shared prayer. The old form of the Lord's Prayer is dear to contemporary Christians; it is the word that is near them, in their hearts and on their lips, precisely as something said again and again. The impressive fuels the expressive. Novelty and invention disperse us; prayer repeated a thousandfold concentrates us, sharpening rather than dulling the expressive power of our faith.

In the collects that bring the routine of prayer toward its end, this logic is recapitulated. The impressive force of Christ empowers and transforms, and both elements are directly proportionate. Each collect begins by identifying the unique and determinate form of divine life, the originative fact of the revealed Lord. We pray *because* God has taken a powerfully present and concrete form in Christ. In him we know to whom we should pray. The narrowness of the way ensures that we can clearly identify our Lord. Then our lives are *brought into* the orbit of divine life. In the focused person of Christ there is room and scope for our lives and concerns. Finally, the collects close with a formulaic return to the person of Christ, now pronouncing that *through* him our particular needs may be articulated and heard.

The narrow patterns of psalm and canticle, like the narrow way of God to us in the passion, death, and resurrection of Jesus of Nazareth, are a beginning and end that give us life precisely because of, not in spite

of, the concentrated impress of their sharp outlines and determinate shape. We must give ourselves to this fixed form, both the man Jesus of Nazareth and a life of encompassing, apostolic, and impressive prayer. This doxological path anchors and animates our lives. The impress of Christ, and of the tradition of prayer he both accepted and redoubled, has the force and urgency to drive us to express our mission in the world through prayer and service.

The collects that draw Morning and Evening Prayer to a close outline the work of Christ in our lives and in the world. "Drive from us wrong desires," asks the Collect for the Renewal of Life, "incline our hearts to keep your law" (BCP, p. 99). The Collect for Friday is emphatic: "Grant us your servants so to follow in faith where you have led the way, that we may at length fall asleep peacefully in you and wake up in your likeness" (BCP, p. 123). These collects ask for that which the method of the Daily Office demands and provides: the formation of our lives according to the encompassing and impressive way of Jesus Christ. This is an ever-urgent mission. We are to move toward a more perfect faith, "that our lips may praise you" and "our lives may bless you" (BCP, p. 123). The Holy Spirit glorifies the Father, and does so by bringing us into the way of his Son.

We should not imagine, however, that the Daily Office speaks only to personal piety. The Christian life is not solitary. The Holy Spirit does not work upon us by inward and private means. The church is the indispensable source and focus of discipleship. Custodian of the apostolic witness, the church draws us into the way of Jesus. The collects emphasize this work of the church. "Send forth upon us the Spirit of love," petitions a collect from Evening Prayer, "that in companionship with one another your abounding grace may increase among us" (BCP, p. 125). Through mutual support and exhortation, the Holy Spirit sanctifies the faithful as a gathered people. Marked by baptism and ordered toward fellowship in the bread and cup, the church is structured as a life of committed and mutual service.

This fellowship is not a means to any higher and further end, not to personal growth or social justice, not to spiritual insight or inclusive community. A collect from Morning Prayer expresses this clearly. "Receive our supplications and prayers," asks the collect, "which we offer you for all members of your holy Church, that in their vocation and ministry they may truly and devoutly serve you." The circle of prayer and mission is tightly drawn. Our mission to each other is to pray on behalf of others. More important, we pray that each of us, absent and present, might seek to serve God more fully, that each might join his or her voice to the voices of angels and archangels and with all the company of heaven, singing together the hymn "Holy, holy, holy Lord, God

of power and might, heaven and earth are full of your glory." In short, the mission of the church is to become a more perfect fellowship, bound ever more tightly to the end of drawing near to the Lord in songs of praise. Thus to pray for and with others is to pray that we should fall, both as individuals and as a community, into the narrowness of his way.

The Christian mission to the world is no different. Collects from Morning Prayer ask that the Lord "may bring those who do not know you to the knowledge and love of you" and that God will "bring the nations into your fold" (*BCP*, pp. 100–101). The collects from Evening Prayer strike the same note: "Let the whole earth also worship you, all nations obey you, all tongues confess and bless you, and men and women everywhere love you and serve you in peace" (*BCP*, p. 124). All must come captive to Christ. We may bridle at such "triumphalism," but it is nothing more than the cosmic dimension of the impressive force of the recitations of psalm and canticle. Creation and human history have a determinate, fixed destiny. Christ is the end point of all things, and the world must take on his impress in order to be fulfilled; the cosmos must be Christ-formed in order to find its full expression.

As an instrument of the Holy Spirit, the church has a decisive role. As St. Paul teaches, "The creation waits with eager longing for the revealing of the children of God," for "creation itself will be set free from its bondage to decay and will obtain the freedom of the glory of the children of God" (Rom. 8:19, 21). The glory of the children of God is found in their participation in the Lord of glory, in Jesus Christ, whose way in the world is marked out with utter clarity. To the extent that the church is shaped by the impress of Jesus Christ—and this is the surpassing ambition of the Daily Office—it is gathering all things toward their consummation. The proper expression of the longings and groanings of all things, including our own, is the impress of his narrow way.

The expressive moment of the prayers culminates with the rubric that allows for intercessions. Prepared by recitation, animated by listening to Scripture, and trained in petition by the collects, the believer is authorized to articulate his or her need, concerns, and hopes. The venture of the Daily Office, like the venture of God in Christ, requires this moment for unanticipated and individualized prayer. All things are stamped by the impress of Christ, carved into proper shape and form by the hydraulic forces of communal prayer, and under that impress the true shape and purpose of all things, precisely as distinctive and individual, finds power and voice. As we draw nearer to Christ, this impress must come into active engagement with all aspects of our lives. The intercessions are the workshop of this process. Our prayers, then, silent or spoken, are wrought from the raw material of our intrinsically diverse lives by the sharp blows of divine love, made weighty in the fleshly form of Jesus of

Nazareth and delivered effectively in the fixed and sensuous patterns of recitation, lection, and collect. Our prayers are necessarily personal; yet, without contradiction, they are motivated and shaped by the apostolic prayers of the church. We express ourselves because of, in, and through him. Just as the Lord's Prayer is his, and because he is for us ours as well, so also must our intercessions be genuinely our own but his as well.

Final Recapitulation

Morning and Evening Prayers close with a Prayer of General Thanksgiving. This prayer fuses the impressive and expressive. We thank God for all the blessings of this life, but above all for his redemption of the world in Jesus Christ. We express our thanksgiving and praise and in so doing identify precisely the fixed anchor of divine love, whose impress we seek. We thank God for drawing us into Christ's narrow way. However much we may be engaged with the diversity of worldly obligations and responsibilities, pleasures and joys, we can never say, "We pray, O Lord, that having grasped the mystery of Christ, we may get on with life." His way is fathomless, and we can never plumb the depths of the cross. Just so, we can never turn from psalm and canticle, thinking we have dwelt fully and finally in the truth of this narrow way of prayer. The Daily Office has no end, precisely because God's way to us in Jesus Christ continues to the end of the age.

This close conjunction of expressive and impressive moments is recapitulated immediately. We seek to show forth God's praise, to express our thanksgiving. The General Thanksgiving exhorts us to do so in our lives as well as with our lips. Not only should our life of personal prayer fall under the impress of Christ, so also should our actions. We not only pray that God give rest to the weary, bless the dying, soothe the suffering, pity the afflicted, shield the joyous, we pray that *we will do so* as well. The impress of Christ is active; his form bursts forth into our lives as well as onto our lips.

Yet here again the doxological pneumatology of the Daily Office is crystal clear. Our expressive engagement with the world in no way distances us from Christ. Christian morality is not a negotiation between churchly ideals and worldly obligations. The way of Christ does not overlay everyday life; it is not something that requires "mediation" or a "dialectic" of transcendence and immanence. We show forth the Lord's praise in our lives by giving ourselves to his service. We may fail to do so; indeed we certainly fail. However, we must not translate our inability to entirely give ourselves over to his impress as justifiable. We

must never treat the distance between him and us as somehow right and fitting.

Here the Daily Office circles back upon itself. To express our faith in Christ entails giving ourselves to his service, both with our lips and in our lives. We must receive his impress in order to faithfully express his holiness and righteousness. Thus our moral vocations, like our prayers, must always find their impetus *because* of Christ, must have the uniqueness of circumstance and responsibility *brought into* his divine life, and must be followed *through* the narrowness of his way. This means, at the very least, that our moral life must be as fused to the recitations of psalm and canticle as our religious imagination. The way of Christ through the world, in both speech and action, is always a narrow way, fixed by sharp boundaries. Just as we share in his prayer when we say the psalms he said, we may also share in his obedience to the will of the Father. His narrow path—"Not my will, but thine"—can be ours without alienation or diminution.

This, then, is the pneumatological pattern of the Daily Office. We are shaped by the impress of recitation and activated by the reception of an ever-new Word. This impress of apostolic prayer and teaching allows us to express prayer for ourselves, the church, and the world that leads back to the sharp outlines of the cross, that follows the pattern by which the Lord comes to us in Christ and we to him. The consequences of this pattern for the Christian life is clear. However diverse our experiences and responsibilities, however distinctive our imaginations and unspeakably personal our fears and despairs, the life of faith has a necessarily fixed form that gives us the power of expression.

To be sure, we must beware of Anglican arrogance and conceit. Nothing so specific as the Anglican form of Morning and Evening Prayer is necessary. That pattern of discipline is both ancient and wholesome, and we should cherish the prayer book's judicious preservation of the Daily Office. But its purpose is to make us Christians, not Anglicans. Its goal is to anchor us in a language of prayer that makes the deeper, utterly necessary form of Christ more visible, and certainly other forms of encompassing, fixed, and apostolic prayer may yield the impress of Christ as well.

What is crucial, then, is the ambition and focus of this tradition of prayer. It trains us for discipleship. Our abandonment to psalm and canticle, lectionary and collect prepares us for our crucial and far more taxing abandonment to the narrow way of our Lord.

Drawing Near in the Daily Office

We live in an age in which the narrow way of discipleship is a scandal. We decry dogmatic conformity and claim to celebrate diversity. We

cover novelty and make a cult of creativity. We have readily at hand any number of evasions of the narrow way. We imagine that we must distance ourselves from the apostolic tradition in order to be "open to the Holy Spirit." We eagerly chastise commitments to ancient prayer as "idolatry." We beat away the claim of psalm and canticle by pretending that these inherited forms of prayer are not God's praise given to us but are expressions of the religious imaginations of pious ancients. We raise a smokescreen of ambiguity by claiming that a properly "incarnational theology" is open to God in all things and therefore we should not limit ourselves to things that are labeled "Christian." These slogans and many more are as easy as they are ubiquitous.

We articulate the same evasions in our moral lives. Surely, we think, we have worldly responsibilities that must have their own place in the life of discipleship. We live across a highly varied grid of duties and obligations. We must vote intelligently. We must serve on committees, do our job well, love our children, and care for our parents. Surely, we think, our mission to the world must somehow negotiate with these moral concerns. And in an ether of "sensitive moral judgment" we mix and match Christian teachings with our moral intuitions. We want to pirouette across the stage of world history, retaining our worldly roles while genuflecting to the altar. We hide behind shibboleths about the "Anglican way" of Scripture, tradition, and reason as if those who preceded us in the faith were engaged in a great balancing act.

However real and pressing might be our worldly context, we must look again and more closely at how much of what we take for granted actually shifts in the sands of our unstable culture. Yesterday's civil rights hero is today's multicultural goat. Yesterday's antipoverty gospel is today's paternalistic failure. Yesterday's gentleman is today's sexist bore, or worse. Who knows what tomorrow might bring? If we think the subtle texture of our worldly responsibilities may serve to anchor our faithful witness, we are fools whom our fickle world shall mock the moment we settle into the certainties of our social witness. We must find the anchor for mission elsewhere: in Christ. We should not entrench ourselves on the floodplains of our times. We must throw ourselves upon the narrowness of Christ. Only then may we walk among the worldly powers in freedom.

The Daily Office trains us rightly. At every turn, with the shocking fixity and unvarying patterns of its prayer, the Daily Office issues the central challenge of Christianity to our world: God has done something decisive and final in Jesus Christ. Therefore to get to what is "good news" we must go through him. To affirm this entails repudiating the pious flatulence that claims we do not know where the Holy Spirit is leading us. The good news of God's power and might is in Christ. Therefore the

Holy Spirit is always, always leading us into his narrow way, for only because of Christ, and through Christ and in Christ, do we have life. If we are to speak of the mission of the Holy Spirit, then we must make Christ the Alpha and the Omega. We must dwell more deeply in his way. There is no other mission of the Christian in the world.

Because Christ is not an idea, or a sentiment, or a feeling, his way has weight and edge. He is a person, and like every person, he did very specific things, and very specific things were done to him. As our Savior, Jesus is all things to all people—he awakens us, shapes us, and enlivens us—but he is not all things and is not all people. However much we might wish to place the Christian witness to Jesus in a fog of historical-critical speculation or to throw everything up for grabs with various theories about the universality of “faith experience,” we do know Jesus. Scholars can debate pericopes and sayings, raise up endless theories about original audience and the Mediterranean matrix for ancient Christian teaching. Nonetheless contemporary believers, like believers through the centuries, have a remarkably clear view of Jesus. Good Friday and Easter Sunday are strange and alien *because of* the clarity of the events. He may throw our lives into utter turmoil, but this man from Nazareth who died on a cross on Golgotha and rose from a tomb outside of Jerusalem is quite vivid. The fleshly weight of his humanity and the sharp outline of events that defined his life and death give Jesus Christ purchase in our souls.

The work of the Holy Spirit is singular: to shape us under the weight of Jesus Christ, and through us to bring the whole world under his lordship. The church is central to this work, and the Daily Office is central to the church. As a daily pattern of prayer dedicated to Christ as Lord, Morning and Evening Prayer exhibits the encompassing ambition of the Holy Spirit on behalf of Jesus died and risen. Grounded in the prayer and prophecy of the Old Testament and saturated with the New Testament witness, the Daily Office’s apostolic heritage testifies to the way the work of the Holy Spirit always emerges out of and returns to Jesus Christ. Fundamentally shaped by recitations of psalms and canticles, this narrow way of prayer trains us as disciples of the narrow way of Christ crucified. Receptive in hearing Scripture and expressive in collect and intercession, participants in the Daily Office are launched toward an ever wider gathering of all things to the Lord. In all four ways—encompassing, apostolic, impressive, and expressive—the Daily Office works upon us in just that way in which the Holy Spirit does the work of Christ in the world.

Reflections in Aid of Theological Exegesis

You who once were far off have been brought near.

Ephesians 2:13

Students of our revered scriptures must be taught to recognize the various kinds of expression in holy scripture, to notice and memorize the ways it tends to say things, and especially—this is paramount and vital—to pray for understanding.

St. Augustine, *De doctrina Christiana*

The challenge of theological exegesis is not altogether different from other situations of reading and listening. The difficulties of interpretation rest in the problem of hearing what is said. For a number of reasons we are often very distant from what is spoken, and as a consequence it is difficult to hear. For example, my daughter is often in the basement reading a book, and she only vaguely hears me yell for her to go and clean her room. She hears but does not hear. As parents know, one must be rather close to children in order to get them to pay attention.