

Liturgy from Shane Claiborne's "Common Prayer for Ordinary Radicals"

“Oh, Lord, let my soul rise up to meet you,” we are ascending beyond this world and all that is temporary. It is not an escape. Just the opposite — it is a warning not to escape from the eternal into the stuff of earth. In liturgical prayer, we are never alone, because we are surrounded by the thousands of folks who are singing and praying with us around the world. And as we pray, we are lifted up into a place beyond the building or city we are in. We are living in the “city of God,”

Liturgy is not about getting indoctrinated. Doctrines are hard things to love. It’s not even really about education. Liturgy at its core is not about learning facts and memorizing phrases. Liturgy is soul food. It nourishes our souls just as breakfast strengthens our bodies. It’s sort of like family dinner. Hopefully you get some nutritious food, but more than nutrition, family dinner is about family, love, community. Liturgy is kind of like family dinner with God. Liturgical theologian Aidan Kavanaugh says it well: “The liturgy, like the feast, exists not to educate but to seduce people into participating in common activity of the highest order, where one is freed to learn things which cannot be taught.”

While liturgy is a party, it’s also about disciplining our spirits like we exercise our muscles. Certainly we are learning as we pray, as we listen

to Scripture, as we learn the songs and stories. But we are also participating in the work of God — active prayer, active worship. As we will see, liturgy offers us an invitation not just to observe but to participate. “O Lord, let my soul rise up to meet you” invites us to respond, “As the day rises to meet the sun.” When we hear, “God is good,” we want to call back, “All the time.”

Liturgy is a dialogue, a divine drama in which we are invited to be the actors. We become a part of God’s story. We sing God’s songs. We discover lost ancestors. And their story becomes our story. Welcome to a Whole New World. Liturgy is a workout for the imagination, because we are invited to see the reality of the universe through a new lens. Liturgy offers us another way of seeing the world. The liturgical imagination is different from the imagination of films or video games, though every once in a while you catch a film that gives you a hint of another world.

Common Prayer helps us to see ourselves as part of a holy counterculture, a people being “set apart” from the world around us (and the world inside us) to bear witness that another world is possible. We’re invited to become a peculiar people, living into a different story, and orienting our lives around a different set of values than those we are taught by the empires and markets around us. In an individualistic culture, liturgy helps us live a

communal life. In an ever-changing world, liturgy roots us in the eternal — something that was around long before us and will live long after us, a God who is the same yesterday and today and tomorrow.

But liturgy is meant to be an interruption. It disrupts our reality and refocuses it on God. It reshapes our perceptions and lives with new rhythms, new holy days, a whole new story.

What we discover is not just a poetic genius behind the words but a community in, with, and under the words. Just as people of the world pledge allegiance to flags or sing national anthems with pride and adoration, these creeds, songs, and prayers are ways that we proclaim our allegiance and sing our adoration not to a nation but to another kingdom altogether. That may sound a little esoteric or ethereal, like heaven is less real than the stuff of earth. But liturgy actually draws us out of the world of counterfeit power and splendor and into another reality. As we pray, this world, with its billboards and neon signs and false promises, becomes ghostlike. We are invited into an ancient and eternal place and community.

The world the liturgy reveals may not seem relevant at first glance, but it turns out that the world the liturgy reveals is more real than the one we inhabit day by day. It outlasts McDonald's and Walmart, America and South Africa. The songs and readings

and prayers of the liturgy are more ancient and true than any culture or empire.

The liturgy presents a form of worship that transcends our time and place. It does not negate culture but creates a new one.

Certainly we can see the fingerprints of the cultures from which it has come — Mediterranean, Greco-Roman, North African, German, Frankish, Anglo-Saxon. But we are formed into a people who are singing songs and prayers that transcend place and nation. Though its forms may vary, the liturgy will never grow old. It has been meaningfully prayed by bakers, housewives, tailors, teachers, philosophers, priests, monks, kings, slaves, Shane Claiborne, Common Prayer for Ordinary Radicals, Zondervan.