



Anglican Catholic Church



Diocese of the United Kingdom

Catholic Faith † Orthodox Worship † Apostolic Order

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My dear friends and colleagues,

The Transfiguration, which we celebrate on 6 August, must have left the disciples in a spin! But as well as confusing them it must also have proved a real tonic. They had already followed Jesus for some time, and seen all manner of incredible things, but only now do they glimpse “reality”. Only now do they see Jesus – if only for a moment – as He really is, ever was, and always will be. Here was His glorious divinity shining through His frail humanity. What a blessed moment to ease their human fears. But such a blessing was not given just to indulge them. The apostles would *need* this vision of glory for they were heading down a dark and dangerous road. Jesus had said He would die, so it was a journey leading to pain, ridicule and death. Jesus would not only cause them confusion in the coming weeks, but their hearts would be broken, and they would become outcasts. So this moment of clarity was given to provide hope in darkness. When they were at their lowest, the memory of that brilliant light would point them to reality and reassure their broken spirits.



What does this mean today? Well although Christian life brings unsurpassed joy, that is not to say it is easy! Far from it! Christians must take up the cross daily – daring to swim against the tide of this fleeting, selfish world.

When we stand up for Jesus we soon discover the pain of the cross. But persevere – this is the road to resurrection. It's easy to put on the outward appearance of faith – to go to church, spout Christian ideals, and challenge no-one. That is effortless and many do it, including those in mitres and birettas! If you, like some of the mainstream Churches, peddle what appears on the surface to be a Christian life, only emphasising the bits that cause no offence and watering down the bits that do, you can be certain of worldly support. But to stand up for Jesus is something else altogether.

If we defend the faith that comes from the apostles, refusing to water scripture down to appease secular opinion and fads, we can be assured of ridicule and pain. Some people soon discovered in their former Churches that they were no longer wanted. If they wouldn't subscribe to the “improved” revelation by the modern world then they were to be banished. So what sees us through these difficult moments of faith? And why do the faithful remain so happy, so determined, so full of faith in the Lord?

The *true* Christian never loses heart, because they have built a genuine relationship with God. And in moments of darkness living faith sustains us. If God is with us who can be against us? Our reward is found in moments of grace, moments when God comes close to us, when the Mass truly sustains us.

And remember that on that mountain something other than the transfiguration of Jesus occurred. The apostles themselves were transformed. Their faith was changed. Their fear was overcome. We who dare to follow Jesus may face mockery and persecution – but we will know deeper joy than this world has to offer.

With every blessing

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We don't have to dumb liturgy down

Liturgy is not just a matter of taste. Good liturgy elevates our minds, and indeed all of our senses, drawing us closer to God. It can sometimes even be uncomfortable, because it forces us to grapple with the immensity of the mysteries that are found in the Mass.

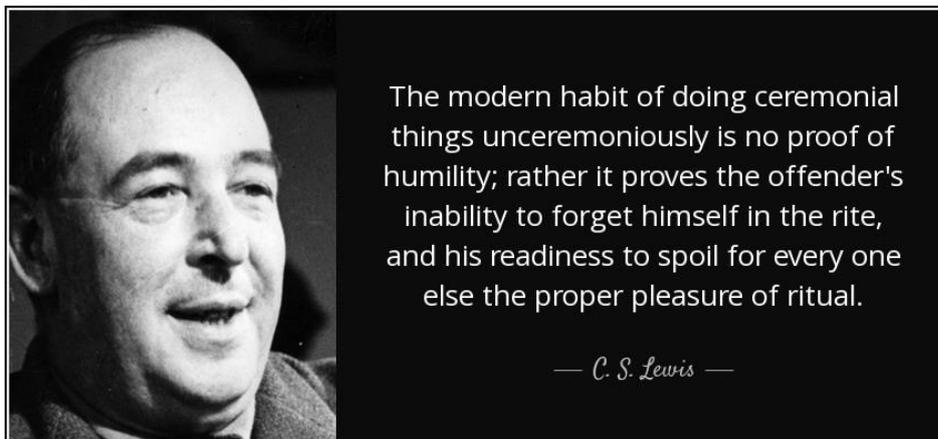
Bad liturgy is often oriented towards making worship a more comfortable and communal sort of experience. Frequently it is considered a sign of humility to do or to wear what is a very poor offering indeed to God. It's easy to understand why this might appeal. People often like to shed liturgical formality in favour of something more "novel", or "original", or "matey", or "communal". That's really just because they prefer to downgrade ceremony into something that doesn't require them to think about the real, serious significance of what it means. Consider the absurdities that take place in many contemporary services, including weddings and funerals, and you can understand the point.

It's interesting how very bad liturgy can often resemble the sort of "entertainment" we normally expect to find in kindergartens or children's summer camps. Bad liturgical taste doesn't make you an overall bad person of course, but bad liturgical taste is still bad! It prevents us from availing ourselves of one very precious pathway by which we can draw closer to God, and Heaven.

The Sacrifice, and Christ's literal presence among us, are clearly the most important things about the Mass. It is possible for those elements to be present in the sorts of Masses that I might describe as unworthy, but liturgy is for us a way of giving honour and adoration to God. It also serves as a teacher, which helps mere mortals like ourselves to grasp the significance of these magnificent metaphysical realities. It matters. So liturgy is actually relevant to the salvation of souls.

Now those of us who maintain that a reverent and beautiful liturgy is superior are frequently accused of being old-fashioned, stuck in the past, holier-than-thou. But even children can be very vocal critics of something they find uninspiring and without meaning. A couple of reactions from children recounted here are revealing, with one confusing a modern Mass for a "party," while a five-year-old mistook the sharing of the peace for the end of the Mass (because it wasn't clear to him why else people would be hugging, chatting and moving about all over the place).

We do not and should not be expected to bring everything, including our worship of Almighty God, down to the lowest common denominator, or ostentatiously make a show of a manufactured and false humility (which we witness at the very highest levels in church leadership). C. S. Lewis neatly sums it up below.



(My "desk picture" shows an Isle of Sheppey scene viewed from my desk, from the garden, or within a few minutes of it.)