



“Worship is not just one among many things that the church does; it is the central action that shows what the church is and in which the church becomes more aware of itself as the people of God. It is the only thing that the church does now that will continue forever in the praise of the hosts of heaven. While it is possible to worship anywhere, worship usually demands a space of its own”

*~ The Rev.
Philip
Pfatteicher,
Manual on the
Liturgy,
1979 A.D.*

Living the Liturgy

the gifts of God in all of life

The “House of God”

When King David first wanted to build a temple for God, God said, “No!” “The Most High does not live in temples made by human hands” (Acts 7:48). Rather, God’s temple is the Church, the Body of His people among whom He dwells through Jesus Christ.

It is in this sense that we call the buildings in which we worship “the house of God.” It’s not as though they are temples where God dwells, and nowhere else. But it’s also not that they are unimportant, disposable spaces. They house God’s people as they gather around Him in His Word, on His table, and in His gifts. Something holy and unique happens here, a gracious encounter between God and the world, experienced through the Body of Christ.

Christians therefore cherish their places of worship. As good stewards of God’s earthly gifts, they design and keep those places in a way that proclaims their faith and points away from themselves to the Risen One who is present.

Traditionally, this has meant building places, however small, in the shape of the cross, proclaiming God’s mercy, or with high ceilings, pointing to His power; with the Lord’s table at the center, focusing on His incarnate, continuing presence on earth; with décor that proclaims the Bible in color and beauty; with solidity so as to proclaim God’s constancy; with cleanliness, so as to proclaim the care and hospitality that Christians have for one another; with natural materials that proclaim God to be the good Creator of all things.

It’s not a matter of pampering ourselves or pleasing God: it’s a matter of public witness, and drawing all of creation, even stone, wood, and art, into the worship of God’s beloved Son.

Inhabiting the House of God

When St. John recorded his vision of the heavenly worship (the Book of Revelation), he described a scene of stunning visual beauty. Over centuries of worship, the Church has reflected this beauty by developing a “visual language” of worship. Below are a few descriptions of that visual language, and tips for how to make it your own.

All Lines Converge: In classical church architecture, all lines of the building converge on the altar, placed front and center. **Devotional Tip:** Upon entering for worship, center your own eyes and heart in devotion upon the altar and the gifts you receive there.

Altar and Font: Altars are often shaped like tombs; fonts have 8 sides. The tomb-shape reminds us that the body on this altar once lay in a tomb; the 8 sides connects Baptism to Noah’s ark, in which 8 persons were saved. **Devotional Tip:** explain these meanings to a child, so that they may rest in their promise.

Natural Materials: Churches are traditionally built from stone, wood, baked clay, wool, cotton, glass, and other natural materials. **Devotional Tip:** During worship, notice the beauty of nature before your eyes, remember its source, and thank God for all creation.

Stained Glass: It doesn’t keep light out, but let’s *the Light* in! Through stained glass, all ages can see and learn the events of Scripture: **Devotional Tip:** Direct a child’s attention to one window each time you’re here, sharing with the child the stories portrayed there.

Vestments: Clergy do not wear vestments to distinguish them, but as a covering that de-emphasizes their personality; they act solely in God’s stead and by His command.

Devotional Tip: Pray for the Holy Spirit to be with your clergy before worship, sermons, and Holy Communion.

The Cross: A cross or crucifix adorns the front of most worship places. This reflects Scripture: “We preach Christ, and Him crucified” (1 Corinthians 1:23, 2:2). **Devotional Tip:** Remember the crucifixion each day, perhaps at noon (when Christ hung on the cross), giving thanks for its redemption.

“Movement is characteristic of liturgical worship. There are processions . . . there are sacramental actions [including prayer] . . . Since liturgy is action and involves movement, attention must be given not only to the words and music, but to the place of action, the space in which the liturgy is done. Effective use of space promotes and encourages an understanding of what people do in the service. And conversely, poor use of space undermines and weakens liturgy and thereby contributes to the shriveling of faith.”

~ The Rev.

*Philip Pfattiecher,
Manual on the Liturgy,
1979 A.D.*