

The Source and Summit of Christian Life

Last week I handed out a general leaflet as a foundation for us to begin looking carefully at our celebration of the Eucharist. Today therefore we start with a more detailed examination of the liturgy. The twin purposes of the liturgy can simply be stated: to praise God and to transform the worshipers. In one sense it is a single purpose for God is given glory when we are transformed into the image of Christ. In the words of the first century St. Irenaeus “the glory of God is the human person fully alive.” The whole of our prayer life is really an opening up to God by surrendering ourselves completely into God’s hands. This is the orientation of our personal prayer and in a similar fashion we do the same in our liturgy. Thus entering into the liturgy requires openness from us. It requires letting go of our individual preferences and desires in order to come together as a single community united in our baptism as the people of God. We come together as a community to listen to God’s word and celebrate the Eucharist. To do this we need firstly to recognise the four ways that Christ is present; in the assembly gathered, in the priest presiding, in the word proclaimed and in the meal shared. The presence of Christ in the tabernacle is derivative of and secondary to his living presence in the celebration of the Eucharist itself. So above all we start with a recognition of Christ’s presence in the assembly itself.

Questions for Reflection and Discussion.

1. What place do you think our personal prayers have in the way in which we pray the liturgy together?
2. How can we relate to the others present in ways that express the fact that we are together the Body of Christ?
3. The liturgy is meant to transform us. On what occasions do you remember being changed by your participation in the church’s worship?
What signs of transformation do you see our community of faith?