

Lesson No. 42

**THE HISTORY OF THE LITURGY (1)
THE FIRST FOUR CENTURIES**

References:

The Shape of the Liturgy, D. G. Dix
The Liturgy of St. Mark, Fr. M. Dawood
Prayers of the Eucharist, Jassper and Cuming

Notes For Servants:

- 1.
- 2.

Objectives:

General:

Specific:

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.

Instructions:

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.
- 4.
- 5.

Bible Verse:

“Offer the sacrifices of righteousness, and put your trust in the LORD.”

(Psalm 4:5)

Lesson:

**THE HISTORY OF THE LITURGY (1)
THE FIRST FOUR CENTURIES**

THE LITURGY IN THE APOSTOLIC CHURCHES:

The Liturgy and its rites were handed by the Apostles to the churches which they had established. The Apostles were taught by the Lord himself, who for forty days, following His resurrection spoke to them "of the things pertaining to the kingdom of God." (Act 1:3)

Saint Paul emphasizes this fact when he says: "For I have received of the Lord that which also I

delivered unto you, that the Lord Jesus the same night in which He was betrayed took bread ..." (1Cor 12:23) Here, Saint Paul emphasizes the fact that each Apostle received the Liturgical tradition from the Lord Himself. Dix affirms the same when he writes: "Every Local church had received the rite of the Eucharist the way of performing it-with its first evangelisation. This is important. It means that the living tradition of the liturgy as the heart of its corporate life went back into the very roots of every apostolic church."

DOCUMENTATION OF THE LITURGY:

In the beginning, the liturgy was passed from the Apostles to their successors, the bishops as an oral tradition. This is the same way in which the books of the Bible were propagated. Oral tradition always preceded the written forms of both the Bible and the liturgies.

The liturgy was commanded to writing only after heresies started to appear in the church, and when heretics attempted to put their heretic teachings into the liturgy. The fact that a manuscript of a liturgical text is dated to the fourth century, does not mean that the liturgy was composed in the fourth century but merely that it was recorded in writing in the fourth century. Hamman emphasizes this: "The setting down in a written form of the Liturgical prayers in both Judaism and Christianity is a relatively late phenomenon. In both cases, it came about only after it was felt that tradition was in danger of being changed as long as it was not cast in forms that were set even to their last details. ... This is indeed the reason why we see Christian texts of this type becoming common only after the great crisis of Arianism i.e. after the second half of the fourth century."

Some of the heretical texts were also put in writing and these serve to emphasize the point we just mentioned, that the church put the liturgy in writing to guard it against such corrupt influences.

Other texts are also recorded, which although not heretical, yet do not represent the common usage of the church but rather a very localized tradition. An example of these is *THE EUCHOLOGIUM OF SERAPION* which appears to be the work of Bishop Serapion of Thmuis (Demiat). Such texts became extinct as the authority of the pre-eminent Bishop became established in each *see* (ecclesiastical jurisdiction), around the fourth century.

THE LITURGY OF ALEXANDRIA

Saint Mark, one of the seventy Apostles, who brought Christianity to Egypt around the middle of the first century A. D., also brought to Egypt the Liturgy that bears his name; The Liturgy of Saint Mark. This Liturgy which was originally in Greek, is probably the oldest and most authentic Liturgy in Christendom.

Saint John Chrysostom tells us that St. Mark was the first Apostle to inscribe the Liturgy, in the form of a service or a regular church ritual which is strictly followed in the celebration of the Eucharist. This is not without Biblical foundation. We know that the very first Eucharist was held in the upper room, in St. Mark's house in Jerusalem. The man carrying the pitcher of water is believed to be no other than St. Mark himself (Mk 14:13-15). The disciples even after the resurrection of the Lord, continued to meet and pray in his home. They also received the Holy Spirit there. According to tradition in all Apostolic churches, St. Mark's home is well known as the first church in the world.

When Saint Athanasius, 20th Patriarch of Alexandria sent Fromentius to Ethiopia in 330 A. D., as the first Egyptian head of the Ethiopian church, he gave him a copy of the Liturgy of Saint Mark, which the Ethiopians started to use immediately.

The Liturgy of Saint Mark has some characteristics that were borrowed by the other liturgies,

e.g. *the preface and the Sanctus*. Gregory Dix emphasizes this: "The use of the preface and the Sanctus in the Eucharistic prayer began in the Alexandrian church at some time before A. D. 230, and from there spread first to other Egyptian churches, and ultimately all over Christendom.

THE LITURGY OF ROME

The earliest Liturgy that is known to exist in the church of Rome is the liturgy of Hippolytus. Most agree now that this liturgy originated in Egypt and was exported to Rome. Hamman, speaking about the early Roman Liturgy had this to say: "The most ancient formula of consecration of the Eucharistic offerings is provided for us by Hippolytus, probably of Egyptian origin, and adopted by the Roman clergy." Dix, quoting another researcher says the same thing concerning Hippolytus: "Are we able to pinpoint his origin? Fr. Hanssens thought it possible and judged that he should be looked upon as an Alexandrian who became a Roman priest, seeking to transport from Alexandria to Rome those forms which he judged ideal." The noted French Theologian Father Louis Bouyer says this about the origin of the Liturgy of Hippolytus : "In any case it is a work of the third century and reflects if not the liturgical life of Rome, then that of Egypt and Alexandria."

THE LITURGY OF JERUSALEM

In Jerusalem, the city of our Lord, the Liturgy of Saint James was the dominant Eucharistic prayer by the fourth century. Not only in Jerusalem, but also in Syria, Arabia, Greece and Armenia. This was accomplished, no doubt, through the many pilgrims who travelled to the holy land.

The Liturgy is attributed to Saint James, the brother of the Lord (the Lord's cousin), who became the first Bishop of Jerusalem and who wrote the Epistle bearing his name in the New Testament. Hamman describes this liturgy by saying: "Despite the hellenization of its form and of the thought beneath it, it is still astonishingly close to the original Eucharyst." The liturgy shows great similarity to the Liturgy of Saint Mark.

THE LITURGY OF ANTIOCH

Antioch was the city in which Barnabas and Paul spent a whole year preaching and where the disciples were called Christians first. (Act 12:25,26). It was the first centre to be preached to outside Judea. In this important centre of Christianity, another Liturgical tradition thrived by the fourth century: The liturgy of the apostles. Supposedly written by Clement, Bishop of Rome, who in turn received it from the Apostles. The Liturgy is very similar to St. Mark's liturgy. It seems to be a re-arranged and expanded version of an earlier local liturgy that must have been very similar to the liturgy of Saint Mark.

An interesting point of historical importance is the prayer for "bishop Annianus and his parishes." St. Annianus was of course the second bishop of Alexandria following St. Mark.

To sum up, of all the four early centres of Christianity, only Alexandria used a liturgy that is considered to be the oldest of all liturgies, that is the Liturgy of Saint Mark. . While Jerusalem and Antioch utilized similar liturgies, very similar to Saint Mark's, but probably modified in form, Rome until the sixth century used a very primitive liturgy, exported to Rome by an Alexandrian priest who immigrated to Rome carrying with him the liturgy that bears his name. This ambitious and aggressive Alexandrian priest, named Hyppolytus opposed the Pope of Rome and became the first "Antipope".

Conclusion:

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.

“Offer the sacrifices of righteousness, and put your trust in the LORD.”

(Psalm 4:5)