



Liturgical Thought

EXPLANATION AND GUIDE TO THE LUTHERAN LITURGY¹

Why does the Salutation precede the Collect?

In the earliest of liturgical traditions, **this was the point at which the celebrant first spoke**, the earlier parts of the service being taken by others (assisting priests, pastors, kantors, or choirs). Known as the **“Little Ordination,”** the **Salutation** serves a special purpose and is more than a simple greeting; it is indicative of the special relationship between the pastor, as **Christ’s ordained representative**, and God’s people.

Therefore the pastor stands in the congregation as **Christ’s servant**. The vestments he wears indicate that **he is not speaking on his own, but as one called, sent, and authorized to represent Christ Jesus**. As the authorized representative of the Lord he faces the congregation and chants or speaks, **“The Lord be with you.”** The congregation responds, **“And with your spirit.”** Pastor and congregation are **bound together in this salutation**, or greeting, as the pastor prays the Collect of the Day **on behalf of the gathered congregation**.

The pastor’s words, **“The Lord be with you,”** are an adaptation of the words of the risen Christ to His disciples, **“Peace be with you.”** Some traditions retained the latter formula **when spoken by a bishop**. These words, which are the **first words Christ said to the disciples** when He appeared to them in the upper room, indicate **the putting away of their sins**, even as the Resurrection itself demonstrates this.

When the pastor says the words of the **Salutation**, he is repeating the pattern set by **Christ Himself**. As in earlier tradition these are **the first words of the pastor** (the preparatory service of Confession and Absolution is not part of the Divine Service itself). As the first words from the mouth of Christ’s ambassador to His people, they reestablish the fact that **their forgiveness has been obtained by His resurrection** and is therefore rightly **granted at once**.

When the people reply, **“And with your spirit,”** they are not merely responding in kind, but are **praying for their pastor, that the Holy Spirit may rest upon him**, for now he will speak to them as bearer of the Office of the Holy

¹ Much of this series on the Liturgy of the Church is found in *Why? A Layman’s Guide to the Liturgy*, by Rev. Burnell F. Eckardt Jr., Repristination Press, (Malone, TX.), and first published in *Gottesdienst, The Journal of Lutheran Liturgy*, in a series by the same name between the years 1985-2005. Used by permission.

Spirit. Therefore **grace is required**, that the pastor may be faithful in the carrying out of his duty, that is, that all the words of the sermon, might be words fitly spoken as **coming from God's ambassador to them**.

✠ ✠ ✠ **Soli Deo Gloria** ✠ ✠ ✠