



Liturgical Thought

EXPLANATION AND GUIDE TO THE LUTHERAN LITURGY¹

Why is the Gradual inserted between the Old Testament and Epistle Readings?

A **Gradual** is a **liturgical chant** traditionally sung between the **Epistle** and the **Gospel** and is composed usually of **Psalm** verses. However, when there is an **Old Testament Reading**, the first half of the **Gradual** up to the **Double Hallelujah** (which relates thematically to the **Epistle**), precedes the **Epistle**; and the **second half** (which relates thematically to the **Gospel**), precedes the **Gospel**. The **Gradual** was named after the step (**gradus**) in the **Chancel** from which it was traditionally sung. Today, the **Gradual** (first half) is seasonal, and the second half is called the **Verse**. The **Gradual**, and **Verse** are taken from the Scriptures and are reflective of the theme of the day and season of the Church year.

The **Gradual** is one of four parts of the **Divine Liturgy** traditionally sung by a **choir** or **kantor**. These include the **Introit, Gradual, Offertory, and Communio** (sometimes called **Communion**). However, unlike the other three, the **Gradual** is not born of the need to fill up the time during which the pastor is doing something else (entering the chancel, preparing the altar, clearing the altar, etc.). Indeed, the **Gradual** is older than our **Divine Liturgy** having been adopted from the practice of the **synagogue** where the **pericope** for the day are interspersed with readings from the **Psalms**.

✠ ✠ ✠ Soli Deo Gloria ✠ ✠ ✠

¹ Much of the content 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.