



Liturgical Thought

EXPLANATION AND GUIDE TO THE LUTHERAN LITURGY¹

Why do we dress well for Worship?

Sometimes it is said that people dress up for church only to show off. This is both improper to think (**for we are required by the Eight Commandment to think well and not evil of our neighbors**) and very likely to be wrong. The Christian's desire to dress appropriately for worship comes from a knowledge of the fact that we come to stand in the presence of God when in Church. That is, Christ is present in the Gospel and in the Sacrament. The preaching of the Gospel and the Holy Liturgy contain Christ Himself, and this can be even more profoundly seen in the Holy Sacrament of the Altar, which is the Body and Blood of Christ. One way to express our faith in this truth is to dress ourselves well, as people who know and live according to this truth. We dress up our building, we dress up our pastor, we dress up our altar and other church furnishings. Is it not fitting, then, that we also dress up ourselves according to our ability?

There is a custom in many churches to dress up a bit more for Sunday than when one attends on another day of the week. This custom has the effect of dressing up the Sunday itself a little more in recognition of our Lord's resurrection on a Sunday.

It is fitting to talk in general terms about the appropriateness of certain clothing at the altar, since we regard it as sacred space.

But is this a law? Certainly not! It is, rather, by a recognition of the Gospel that we learn to dress ourselves well for church. Christians are freed from the demands of the Law in Christ. We live by faith in Him, and our faith has opportunity to express itself according to the freedom of the Gospel.

The law of love does have bearing on this matter, however, in two ways.

First, in that we ought not to become our neighbors' judges, ready to condemn someone for dressing a certain way; we Christians ought to bear with one another's weaknesses, and so fulfill the Law of Christ, as the Apostle says.

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.

Further, what a poor man might call dressing well ought never be looked upon with scorn by someone who has more than he. For to dishonor the poor is to dishonor Christ.

Second, we ought to seek not to give offense by the clothing we wear to the altar, for love of the family of faith ought to be evident especially as we commune together. The liberty of a Christian must always be weighed against the Christian's mindfulness of his neighbor.

✠ ✠ ✠ Soli Deo Gloria ✠ ✠ ✠