



Liturgical Thought

EXPLANATION AND GUIDE TO THE LUTHERAN LITURGY¹

Why is it important for Christians to receive the Holy Sacrament frequently?

This is a question I think it best to allow the blessed Dr. Martin Luther to answer. Let us then look to “Christian Questions with Their Answers” from Luther’s Small Catechism, questions 19 and 20.

“In respect to God, both the command and the promise of Christ the Lord should move him [the Christian], and in respect to himself, the trouble that lies heavy on him, on account of which such command, encouragement, and promise are given.”

Luther then continues, *“But what shall a person do if he be not sensible of such trouble, and feel no hunger and thirst for the Sacrament? To such a person no better advice can be given than that, in the first place, he put his hand into his bosom, and feel whether he still have flesh and blood, and that he by all means believe what the Scriptures say of it, in Galatians 5 and Romans 7.*

“Secondly, that he look around to see whether he is still in the world, and keep in mind that there will be no lack of sin and trouble, as the Scriptures say, in John 15 and 16; 1 John 2 and 5.

“Thirdly, he will certainly have the devil also about him, who with his lying and murdering, day and night, will let him have no peace within or without, as the Scriptures picture him, in John 8 and 16; 1 Peter 5; Ephesians 6; 2 Timothy 2.”

Why is there an eternal light in the sanctuary?

Also known as the **sanctuary light**, the **eternal light** is the candle that hangs from the ceiling of the **chancel**, and properly on the Gospel side of the altar, which is the left side of the chancel as one faces the altar. The **chancel**, or **sanctuary**, is that area around the altar above the first three steps and is traditionally enclosed by a **chancel** (Communion) rail. While the word “**sanctuary**” is sometimes used to refer to the entire worship space, this is a misuse of the term since it defines the sacred space which immediately encompasses the altar. The space in which

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.

the congregants gather for worship is called the “**nave**” from the Latin word, “**navis**” or “ship”. But more on that later.

According to ancient custom, the eternal light signifies not only the light of Christ, as does any candle in the church, but traditionally indicates the presence of the reserved elements from the Holy Sacrament or “**reliquae**” (reli-quay), the fragments that remain (St. Matthew 14:20). In our context here at Redford, we have no proper place to reserve the reliquae which requires a tabernacle and they are therefore consumed at the end of the Mass. Consequently, the sanctuary light at Redford symbolizes the continuing presence of Christ among His people. While custom dictates that the preferred color of the glass for the candle be white or clear, for the light of Christ is neither dim or clouded but shines with a brightness greater than that of the sun (St. Matthew 17; St. Mark 9; St. Luke 9), it has now grown more common to see red glass adorn the light.

✠ ✠ ✠ **Soli Deo Gloria** ✠ ✠ ✠