THE CONVERSATIONS

If you missed last week's entry, Rev. Michael Schutz explained why we cannot earn God's favour. This week, we turn to a question about the order of service. Rev. Mark Smith addresses it in Chapter 4 of *Life in the Body of Christ: Meditations on Living with Christ in His Church*. Dr. T, Director of Communications, introduces the question and presents the chapter as the response.

Dr. T: Why do Lutheran churches follow a particular order of service? What is the significance of the different parts of the Divine Service?

Rev. Smith:

THE DIVINE SERVICE: *Heaven on Earth*

> *"Let us offer to God acceptable worship, with reverence and awe."*
> *(Hebrews 12:28)*

When the Church gathers for worship, it is not simply a routine, a concert, or a lecture. It is a holy encounter. The Divine Service is not chiefly what we do for God; it is what God does for us. He speaks. He forgives. He feeds. He gathers His people around Word and Sacrament, and heaven touches earth.
The name "Divine Service" tells us something profound: it is God's service to us. He is the giver; we are the receivers. From Invocation to Benediction, the triune God is active. The Father calls His children into His presence, and the Son proclaims His Life-giving Gospel and gives His very body and blood for the life of the world. The Holy Spirit creates and sustains saving faith through these gifts. And we, in response, offer thanksgiving, prayer, and praise.

The Liturgy: Ancient and Ever New

The liturgy is not merely tradition, but a gift handed down through the ages, rooted in Scripture and refined by faithful use. Every part points us to Christ. The *Kyrie* cries out to Him for mercy. The *Gloria in Excelsis* echoes the song of the angels at Christ's birth. The

Creed confesses the faith once delivered to the saints. The *Sanctus* joins our voices with angels, archangels and all the company of heaven. The *Agnus Dei* acclaims Jesus as the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world.
This form does not limit us—it frees us. It anchors us in Christ and delivers His gifts week after week, regardless of how we feel. Even when we are weary, distracted, or burdened, the liturgy carries us. It is not dependent on our strength or feelings, but on the power of God's Word and promises.

The Center: Christ for You

At the heart of the Divine Service is the Gospel: Jesus Christ crucified and risen for you. Every hymn, every reading, every word of the sermon, and every element of the liturgy is ordered toward this one purpose: that you may receive Christ and His saving gifts. You come not to perform or impress, but to be filled, forgiven, and fed.
In the Lord's Supper, the risen Saviour is truly present with His people to unite them to Himself. In the preaching of the Word, He speaks life into weary hearts. In the absolution, He declares sinners righteous. And in the psalms and hymns, His faithful respond in thanksgiving and joy.

A Foretaste of the Feast to Come

The Divine Service is not just preparation for eternity: it is participation in eternity. It is heaven on earth. When we gather together around the altar, the Church militant on earth joins the Church triumphant in heaven in one great communion of saints.
And yet, we worship not by sight, but by faith. We hear Christ's voice in the Word. We receive His body and blood in humble bread and wine. We believe what He has promised: that where two or three are gathered in His name, He is there among them (Matthew 18:20).

Come and Be Served

The Divine Service is not first your service to God, but His gracious service to you. It is not a task to fulfill, but a gift to receive. You come as one in need of mercy, and find that mercy overflowing. You come in weakness, and leave clothed in strength. You come with empty hands, and leave full of grace.
So come—week after week—come. For in the Divine Service, the weary find rest, the broken are mended, and sinners are declared saints. Not by our efforts, but by the gracious work of God, who serves His people.

Prayer

Lord of the Church, You gather Your people to receive Your gifts in the Divine Service. Help me to come with reverence, expectation, and joy. Fix my eyes on Jesus, who is present in

Word and Sacrament. Let Your mercy renew my heart and let my praise rise in thanksgiving. Keep me a faithful member of Your house until that day when faith gives way to sight, and I join the heavenly worship forever. Amen.

> *"I was glad when they said to me, 'Let us go to the house of the Lord!'"*
> *(Psalm 122:1)*

Rev. Mark L. Smith *is the Director of International Missions for Lutheran Church–Canada.*

If you've read Rev. Smith's response and still have questions, be sure to send it to us. In the meantime, join us in the next *Conversation*, as we continue our journey back to basics.