

The Lord Calls Us, The Lord Cleanses Us

Sunday School - Covenant Renewal Worship: Class 01

The Lord Calls Us

Being a part of the Church means being a part of the “*ekklesia*”. This means that we are “called out”. The Church is precisely those people who respond to God’s call to “Come, worship, and bow down.” (Psalm 95:6-7)

In many ways the “Call to Worship” is not a part of the divine liturgy. It is the summons to God’s people (and the world) to come and be fully human in their worship of God. Of course, this doesn’t mean that it’s okay to show up after the Call to Worship, but this does help you understand what we are doing in that point of the service.

In our liturgy, our Call to Worship is preceded by two things: (1) a Prelude and (2) a Processional. The prelude serves as a moment to prepare one’s heart to worship. David teaches us that God is enthroned on His people’s praises (Ps 22:3). In the processional, we welcome God into our praises, trusting that He is enthroned on our praises. This is one reason why the processional is always a hymn or psalm of praise.

The next three parts in the Lord calling His people to worship are: (1) The Call to Worship, (2) the Doxology, and (3) the Invitatory (the Venite, Psalm 95). In the Call to Worship, the celebrant declares the purpose of the gathering (in the name of God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit) and gives greetings of “Grace and peace” to God’s people from their God as an authorized herald of the Lord. The Call to Worship concludes with responsive quotations from Psalm 122 and Psalm 124.

In the Doxology, there is a proper response to God’s call for His people to worship Him. The Doxology serves as this response of praise as well as a testimony to the surrounding world that “all creatures here below” should respond to God’s call to worship Him in Christ. So in some ways, the Doxology is both the response of the church to God and the call of the church to the world.

Finally, in the Invitatory, the congregation then sings the *Venite*. *Venite* is Latin for “O Come”, which is the first words of the Psalm 95. This, like the Call to Worship, serves as a call, from God’s word, to come and worship and sing to God.

Summary: The Lord calls His people to worship Him. He does this through His authorized herald. The herald assures that God comes to His people in “grace and peace”. God’s people respond appropriately by singing praise and calling on one another and the whole creation to come and worship God.

The Lord Cleanses Us

The very first thing to do when preparing to meet with God is to confess one’s sin. This is what we do next in the liturgy. The minister calls upon God’s people to confess their sins, trusting that God is merciful. In our liturgy we sing a portion of Psalm 51. This is a prayer to God asking God to restore us to Himself despite our sin.

Our actual confession takes the form of a corporate confession. While many churches do silent, individual confession or both corporate and silent confession, Christ the King only does a corporate confession in our Lord's Day liturgy. This is not because we deny the role of individual confession in the life of the Christian. Rather, this is because we gather as a people on Sundays to worship. Our confession is a corporate one because we are a single body. Yet because we are a body made up of many members, the confession is wide in its scope. It covers all sins that God's people commit on a weekly basis. Sins of thought, word, and deed. Sins of commission and omission.

The cleansing of the Lord concludes with the Declaration of Absolution. Absolution is related to resolving. In God's forgiveness, the Christian is released from the guilt and obligation of their sin. The Declaration of Absolution is one of confidence, not one that serves to insight possible doubt. You have confessed your sin, therefore, as a herald of the gospel, the minister stands to assure you that your sins are forgiven!

How to Think About All This

As modern people, we tend to operate in very secular ways. We don't know how to think symbolically. In fact, we tend to think the opposite of symbolically by thinking mechanistically. Baptism is a prime example of this dilemma. If you go back 1,000 years, the idea that baptism makes someone a Christian is a totally uncontroversial statement. That is because 1,000 years ago, people had a much more symbolic view of the world. Because we have a mechanistic view of the world, we want to know how baptism works at a mechanistic level. This either tends toward people taking a weird approach to the water in baptism, or to people emptying baptism of all its significance ("it's just a symbol").

But if we can remove ourselves from this mechanistic way of thinking, whole new ways of thinking about worship are opened to us. When the minister stands before you on the Lord's Day and says, "Grace to you and peace from God our Father and from the Lord Jesus Christ." how do you understand those words? Is that just your pastor saying that to you? Or, is this an ambassador of God Himself saying this to you? We must attempt to return to realism in our worship. We aren't playing church. We aren't shooting blanks. This is real.

The Lord Consecrates Us

After God has cleansed us from our sins, we ascend into the heavenlies. We mark this transition in our liturgy by singing a hymn of ascent. This is typically, but not always a psalm. During this moment in the liturgy, the ascent is represented by the minister ascending. At this moment, the minister represents the ascent of the congregation into the heavenlies.

In the liturgy, we are associating this portion of our worship with the "Ascension Offering" that is found in Leviticus 1. However, when you read Leviticus, most of your Bibles will have "Whole Burnt Offering" instead of "Ascension Offering". The Hebrew word literally means "that which ascends".

This is unfortunate because it means many helpful associations are often missed. Consider the following: Jacob sees angels ascending and descending upon a ladder between heaven and

earth. Moses *ascends* God's holy mountain to receive the Law. Psalms 124-130 are known as the "Psalms of Ascent" because they were sung as the people *ascended* to Jerusalem to go and worship.

The idea is that the worshiper *ascends* into God's realm. This was symbolically realized in many ways in the Old Covenant (Mountain, Tabernacle, sacrifice, Temple, etc.). In the New Covenant, Jesus is the one who *ascends* into the heavenly realm and he pours out the Holy Spirit on his church so that we might be an ascending community.

After the hymn of ascent, I say the Sursum Corda ("Life up your hearts") and then we pray and sing the Sanctus. This is all symbolizing our ascent into the heavenly realm.

Revelation 4:1–11 (ESV)

4 After this I looked, and behold, a door standing open in heaven! And the first voice, which I had heard speaking to me like a trumpet, said, "**Come up here, and I will show you what must take place after this.**" ²At once I was in the Spirit, and behold, a throne stood in heaven, with one seated on the throne. ³And he who sat there had the appearance of jasper and carnelian, and around the throne was a rainbow that had the appearance of an emerald. ⁴Around the throne were twenty-four thrones, and seated on the thrones were twenty-four elders, clothed in white garments, with golden crowns on their heads. ⁵From the throne came flashes of lightning, and rumblings and peals of thunder, and before the throne were burning seven torches of fire, which are the seven spirits of God, ⁶and before the throne there was as it were a sea of glass, like crystal.

And around the throne, on each side of the throne, are four living creatures, full of eyes in front and behind: ⁷the first living creature like a lion, the second living creature like an ox, the third living creature with the face of a man, and the fourth living creature like an eagle in flight. ⁸And the four living creatures, each of them with six wings, are full of eyes all around and within, and day and night they never cease to say,

"Holy, holy, holy, is the Lord God Almighty,
who was and is and is to come!"

⁹And whenever the living creatures give glory and honor and thanks to him who is seated on the throne, who lives forever and ever, ¹⁰the twenty-four elders fall down before him who is seated on the throne and worship him who lives forever and ever. They cast their crowns before the throne, saying,

¹¹ "Worthy are you, our Lord and God,
to receive glory and honor and power,
for you created all things,
and by your will they existed and were created."

Worship "in Spirit and in Truth"

When Jesus speaks with the Samaritan woman by the well in John 4 he tells her that a time is coming when God's people will worship in "Spirit" and "Truth". How have y'all heard this explained?