

Edgeways Miscellany no. 40  
19 December 2008

A TABLE LITURGY

BEFORE CHRISTMAS DINNER

At the November executive meeting of the local [Canadian] Prayer Book Society, I raised the following observations—which are not news to anyone—(a) that our most sacred festivals have been hijacked by the marketplace and subverted to the ends of a secular society, (b) that these festivals are observed in a secular manner even by many faithful church folk, and (c) that, in consequence, the religion of believing parents too often dies out with the next generation. I pointed out that Judaism is less prone to this erosion because, among other reasons, their sacred festivals are celebrated in the home in a manner whereby feasting and liturgy are intertwined, and the elements of the feasts themselves are instructively symbolic.

I proposed, therefore, that our Branch encourage Christians within our sphere of influence to reclaim our sacred festivals by introducing expressions of family devotion at Christmas dinner, Easter dinner, and Thanksgiving dinner. I doubt that many Anglican families could be persuaded to turn an entire dinner into a liturgy, like the Passover seder, but they might at least be willing to begin dinner with a canticle and some prayers. (If this should become something larger at a later date, well and good.) So I presented a draft of a Christmas table liturgy to the Branch executive. They liked the idea and decided to promote it.

Lord willing, I hope to prepare comparable short liturgies for Easter and Thanksgiving, so that eventually the three might be published together in an attractive booklet. If you think that some people in the UK might like to make use of the liturgy, you/they are welcome to make as many copies as may be required. I don't mind if a token sum is charged to cover duplicating costs. I also don't mind if changes are made. I would be grateful for any feedback that you might offer. *Robert Lyon*

What follows is a slightly edited version. If you have a duplex printer the next two pages can be printed-out as an A4 leaflet, otherwise the two pages can be printed separately, one on the back of the other. Or any photocopier shop would do this from a print-out.

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## BEFORE CHRISTMAS DINNER

*stand or sit*

*A leader reads the first half of each verse, and those at table respond with the second half. Any other method may also be used, including plainsong chant.*

*Leader:* In the sixtieth chapter of Isaiah, the prophet announces God's promises to his covenant people: both to Israel and to the Church.

Arise, shine, for thy light is come,  
**and the glory of the Lord is risen upon thee.**

For, behold, darkness shall cover the earth,  
**and gross darkness the people.**

But the LORD shall arise upon thee,  
**and his glory shall be seen upon thee.**

And the Gentiles shall come to thy light,  
**and kings to the brightness of thy rising.**

Thy gates shall be open continually;  
**they shall not be shut day nor night.**

The sons of them that afflicted thee  
**shall come bending unto thee;**

And all they that despised thee  
**shall bow themselves down at the soles of thy feet.**

And they shall call thee the City of the LORD,  
**the Zion of the Holy One of Israel.**

Violence shall no more be heard in thy land,  
**wasting nor destruction within thy borders.**

But thou shalt call thy walls Salvation,  
**and thy gates Praise.**

The sun shall no more be thy light by day,  
**neither for brightness shall the moon give light unto thee.**

But the LORD shall be unto thee an everlasting light,  
**and thy God thy glory.**

Glory be to the Father, and to the Son, and to the Holy Ghost;  
**As it was in the beginning, is now, and ever shall be, world without end.**  
Amen.

*The mother of the household, or another, lights the candles on the dinner table, then says [John 8:12]:*

Jesus said, "I am the light of the world. He that followeth me shall not walk in darkness, but shall have the light of life."

*Those at table, or one appointed on their behalf, reply [John 1:9-12]:*

**That was the true Light, which lighteth every man that cometh into the world. He was in the world, and the world was made by him, and the world knew him not. He came unto to his own, and his own received him not. But as many as received him, to them gave he power to become the sons of God, even to those who believe on his name.**

*The leader, or all at table if so desired, shall pray the Advent collect:*

Almighty God, give us grace that we may cast away the works of darkness, and put upon us the armour of light, now in the time of this mortal life, in which thy Son Jesus Christ came to visit us in great humility; that in the last day, when he shall come again in his glorious Majesty, to judge both the quick and the dead, we may rise to the life immortal, through him who liveth and reigneth with thee and the Holy Ghost, now and ever. **Amen.**

*Here wine may be poured and dinner served, and a grace may be offered, such as:*

Blessed art thou, O Lord our God, king of eternity, who nourishest our bodies with the fruits of the earth and our souls with the annual remembrance of the birth of Jesus our Saviour. **Amen.**

*Here, or between courses, or after dinner, carols may be sung.*



This liturgy is provided by  
Grand River Branch of the  
Prayer Book Society of Canada  
and by

St George's Reformed Episcopal Church  
Hamilton Ontario

for use in families and other associations of believers  
who share our desire to reclaim  
the significance of our Christian festivals.  
Similar liturgies will be provided  
for Easter and Thanksgiving.

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*The liturgy begins with the diners seated or standing round the dinner table, and with  
candles on the table.*

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