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Homiletics

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HOMILETICS

SEXAGESIMA

FEBRUARY 1

Worship Supplement: A Service of Prayer and Preaching, I (pp. 100 ff.)

Lent is a time of many services. It is also a time when Christian people focus on their living, both its failures and its objectives. The suggested services of prayer and proclamation might prove themselves useful for the midweek Lenten services. If the analysis is correct that sermon series preached during the Lenten Wednesdays have been responsible for destroying the real message of Lent by extending Holy Week all the way back to Ash Wednesday, then the introduction of such a completely different pattern of service might be the first step in a successful rebuilding of Lent. They would orient the midweek services toward prayer. They would establish the purpose of the gathering together as a corporate attempt to help one another express to God such acts of worship that include definite commitment toward holiness of life. This would be in the spirit of Lent, to focus on living worthily while we prepare to celebrate our Lord's rising to new life for us.

These services were drawn up to provide a pattern for corporate worship which would serve the same purpose as has the ante-communion (pp. 5 ff. in *The Lutheran Hymnal*) in the past. When the Word of God is proclaimed in services in which the Holy Communion is not celebrated, the same great power is released among God's people as when that Word is distributed among the people in the body and the blood of Christ. But the liturgy of the Communion has grown up through the centuries to frame in the celebration of the Eucharist. When no Communion is included in the service, the significance of the liturgical pattern is in-

complete. For this reason congregations will find the new patterns of preaching and prayer of interest for Sunday use as well.

It could be noted that the rubric at the end suggests the possibility of preaching the sermon after the opening hymn. This would give opportunity both to alert the parish to their added responsibility in these services to be active in prayer, and also to fill in for them a focus for the significance of those things they will be praying about.

This Sunday's Epistle dominates the day with its amazing picture of the ministry of St. Paul. This might suggest a *Point* dealing with our ministry. The Gospel too reminds us of our responsibility to be good ground that readily receives the Word and brings forth fruit in our ministry. Since this service sets all of our immediate response into worship, the *Point* might be that we should reverence God by a faithful ministry. The congregation should be alerted to the fact that in the acts of adoration we acknowledge God's glory and worship Him, and in that act we admit ourselves to be in a faithful ministry.

The *Problem* could be developed out of the act of confession. Perhaps the pattern of development might be to imagine the actual sound in the church building if the individual thoughts of all the congregation during the confessing of these somewhat formal phrases were to become audible. "We have erred and strayed. . . ." "I just didn't care, God. I knew where the Good Shepherd was, but the grass looked greener. I wanted that extra money and I did, God, I did, I lied. I confess this in sorrow. . . ." Our failures should be related to our responsibility to minister. The basic situation which makes necessary the saving sending of Jesus Christ could be developed out of "there is no health in us."

The *Power* could be developed within the general frame of the ministering Jesus Christ. The act of thanksgiving spells out what God has done for us, "especially for your love in the redemption of the world by our Lord Jesus Christ." The ending of that prayer and all of the petitions in the acts of supplication express the *Point* again, that we reverence God by a faithful ministry.

The significance of following such a sermon by this coordinated sequence of acts of prayer ought not to be overlooked. When God's people actually invest themselves in such prayers they are both preaching to themselves the reality of the truths involved and are at the same time taking the first step in the actual doing of the ministry about which they speak. Praying and ministering are partners. (Material submitted by Ronald Blau, Las Vegas, Nev.)

QUINQUAGESIMA

FEBRUARY 8

Worship Supplement:

The Post-Communion Collects (pp. 47—49)

The Word of God accomplishes its work as God wills whether it is proclaimed or distributed in the Sacrament of the Body and Blood of Christ. We sometimes fail to realize all that the Sacrament's power can accomplish. It brings to us the blessing of new life in Christ—"where there is forgiveness of sins, there is also life and salvation."

The word "viaticum" is defined as "an allowance for traveling expenses; provision for a journey; or the Christian Eucharist given to a person in danger of death." We value the strength of the sacrament when we prepare for the journey of death. The *Point* of this sermon might well be that the Lord's Supper equips us for a Christian life *now*, for today's travel, today's travail. "We implore you that the body and blood of your Son may be our support throughout our earthly pilgrimage."

The greatest of the virtues, St. Paul writes in the Epistle, is love. Faith and hope are big too. The familiar collect after the Communion celebration asks God to strengthen us "through this salutary gift" "in faith toward you and in fervent love toward one another." The last of the new post-Communion collects adds an even more specific plea for the gift to love through the gift of love, the Lord's body and blood. "Holy Father, we ask you now, by this blessed food and drink, to deliver your Church from every evil, to teach it to love you perfectly, and make it truly one." The *Point* of the sermon might be specifically this, that the congregation receive the Sacrament in order to love.

The Collects call for other changes in our lives after the reception of the Lord's Supper, and the *Point* of the sermon might be enlarged to include them all under the "traveling expenses" for which we receive this divine viaticum. It could be summed up in the clause "that the bodies of all who have tasted of your Son's living body and blood may be restored to newness of life." The specifics make quite a list: lips to glorify God in the world, ears closed to the voice of clamor and dispute, eyes beholding God's blessed hope, tongues speaking the truth, continuing as true members of the mystical body, doing the good works God desires, keeping the gift in pure hearts, no stain of sin remaining in us. . . .

The *Problem* might be introduced with sympathetic reference to the partial understanding with which we approach the Sacrament—the reluctance to commune often lest it lose its unusual impact, the four times a year complex, the fear of unworthiness that "eats and drinks damnation" as the less useful translation had it, and so on—all of which could be summed up as seeing the Sacrament as a gift for dying but not for living. But faulty knowledge is not the serious fault—the *Problem* is really present

when we know what the Sacrament gives and then are absent. With what reluctance we receive the power that will help us to be eager disciples. The fact that even with all the help the Word gives to us through Scripture and Sacrament we remain so much the same, we see little or no change in our everyday life, this is not the problem. It is to be expected, as St. Paul testified about his own desires and deeds. But that we do not desire to change, that we desire indeed not to change, that is the *Problem*.

Our Lord stops with us today as we cry, "Jesus, son of David, have mercy." And our Lord gives us the newness of life, the power to love. The *Power* is the proclaiming again that He did indeed go up to Jerusalem, that everything the prophets had written did come to pass, He was mocked and spat on and scourged and put to death. And the *Power* proclamation reaches its climax in the certain fact that He rose again from the dead. The *Power* lies in proclaiming all this with understanding, grasping its significance—this was God loving us so that we could begin to love again. This was God suffering the result of our evil so that we could be changed into good doers. This was God's giving up His only-begotten Son in order to take us again as His born-again sons. This faithful saying should not be hid from our people in order that their love might be more and more apparent.

Las Vegas, Nev. RONALD BLAU

ASH WEDNESDAY FEBRUARY 11

*Worship Supplement: An Order
of Public Confession (p. 55)*

The rubric indicates that this order shall be said on Ash Wednesday and on the First Sunday in Lent and on Passion Sunday. It might therefore helpfully serve as background for the Ash Wednesday sermon in preparation for its repeated Lenten use.

Sackcloth and ashes, dust and ashes, the imposition of ashes—the *Point* is to help people see their sinful natures ("dust thou art") and how this causes their crumbling into dust ("and unto dust shalt thou return"), to admit it, confess it, and find new structural substance in their dear Lord.

What is the largest dirt dam in the world? . . . This dust that is man, how it damns. This dust is a disease, it affects everything and its dissolution is death. Sin is this dustiness. It blows everywhere, it covers everything, it distorts all shapes, it destroys like the storms that resulted in the dust bowl. It is because of this universal blanketing that the dust prevents us from seeing our real natures. Everybody is as shapeless and gray, as crumbly as we. It is this dust blowing into our vision that prevents us from seeing God, from desiring God, God's ways. We are helpless before it. No window can shut it out, no filter filters it. We cannot dust ourselves off, no more than could a table. We cannot alter our dustiness, no more than we could personally deflect a dust blow. What is worse, this condition is not simply one that ought to call forth pity—all of us like suffering Jobs throwing dust onto our bodies, hoping both to still the itch and to awake sympathy in the heart of beholding Deity. We play in it. It is our executive sandbox, our kindergarten hangover. He made us by His divine breath of life into our gathered dust, living souls. But though we kept breathing His oxygen, we vented, from nostrils distorted as toward an unpleasing odor, all His breath of life. And dried up in the snuffing, and crumbled into dustdom.

From dust to mud to man—that was God's way with Adam, God's red-dust man. And now God has collected that basic dust that was made the nature of man and formed the human being anew in His Son Jesus Christ incarnate. He is the second dust-man. The first Adam was doomed to death because of sin, and so was the second—because of

the same sin, Adam's sin, not His own. The problem was not His own, but ours. In His death there was deliverance for all men. He became for all men, and even for you and me, the total dissolution our rejection of God's breath brought about in man. And He adds to our situation now the element needed for new life, for a new structural substance. He is the Water of Life. He is the water that puts us together again, that gathers up our dust and blends it with Him so that we can be shaped up again for service. His Spirit is breathed on us to give us again the life of God and make of us living souls. His Spirit is the inhaling and the exhaling of the presence of God that supplies the continuous moisturing of our very beings that means we are no longer dust but men of God.

INVOCAVIT, THE FIRST SUNDAY IN LENT

FEBRUARY 15

*Worship Supplement: The Offertory
for Lent (p.31)*

"Be imitators of God . . . beloved children." That is the *Point*—that by this sermon we help people to become imitators of the Lord, that they offer up their lips, their lives, their love to the Lord when they hear again their God's invitation to call upon Him.

Our Problem is that we have for so long been so busy imitating everyone else that we have lost sight of the real pattern. Our taste has become so distorted that we have lost all appreciation for that pattern's rightness and its style. We must get this and get that if the neighbors do. We must keep up not only with the Joneses but the Allbrights and the Ingroups. Instead of walking in love, we run in haste. Instead of giving thanks for the things we have, we crab about all we don't have. Instead of singing praises, we sigh complaints. Life is meaningful only in

obtaining, not in offering. Because of all this our wills are no longer free, but forced and foolish even against our own awareness of vanity and catastrophe. We are poor copies of the Master who molded us.

How in all God's world are we to be imitators of our Lord? What in all the heaven is God like? The answer to both questions is the same. Look at Jesus Christ. Jesus Christ is more than the carbon copy of God. He is! He is God made flesh for us. His whole life was a making visible to us the invisible things of God. But more—the purpose of His perfect living was to create copies of His love on this earth, a real creation again, something out of nothing. He did this by the magnetism of His love. He drew us into His pattern by His love. He gave Himself up for us—that much He loves—a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God. His life was God's love offered up for us, drawing us to Him as He was lifted up on the cross, a sacrifice. Fragrant—well pleasing—He did not come crabbing, crying, and complaining, but committed to love the Father and to loving us. By His offering He changes us so that we can offer what He did, our lives and our love. Because we are His children, we can begin now explicitly—

"I will give thanks to you, O Lord . . .

I will sing praises to you . . .

With a free-will offering I will sacrifice
to you . . .

As a beloved child I will strive to be an
imitator of you."

Bethalto, Ill. DUANE A. BRUNETTE

REMINISCERE, THE SECOND SUNDAY IN LENT

February 22, 1969

*Worship Supplement: A Service of
Prayer and Preaching, II*

Some parishes will utilize these proposed services of prayer and proclamation as the pattern for midweek Lenten services. Since

they are structured on the word "Acts," a mnemonic word built from the actions of adoration, confession, thanksgiving, and supplication, a sermon series around those worship actions will suggest itself. If the service is used on a Sunday, the sermon's place, as suggested in the basic pattern, will follow the adoration and confession and precede the thanksgiving. The preacher may capitalize on that position, preparing the people to give thanks by alerting them to what they have already done. Either they have adored the thrice-holy One and have confessed their own unholiness, or they have mouthed the words of confession and adoration without thought or actual self-involvement. And now—the giving of thanks.

Point: Thanksgiving—always a part of worship.

Luther says: "This is a virtue characteristic of real Christians; it is their worship of God at its best. This is a characteristic unattainable by any other human beings on earth. . . . To thank with all your heart is an art—an art which the Holy Spirit teaches. And you need not worry that the man who can really say *Deo gratias* (to God be thanks) with all his heart will be proud, stubborn, rough, and tough, or will work against God with His gifts." (*What Luther Says*, Saint Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1959, p. 1352)

Problem: But we had better worry—now, before we say our *Deo gratias*. For we have already confessed ourselves to be "proud, stubborn, rough, and tough" and admitted

that we have not chosen God's will nor obeyed His commandments. We have described ourselves as cold and unappreciative, plagued by covetousness, discontented, men who have turned from our neighbors, ignored the pain of the world, and passed by the hungry, the poor, and the oppressed. Have we meant all that? If so, how will we say a *Deo gratias*? Or didn't we mean it even though we said it? If so, how will we say *Deo gratias*?

Power: God Himself moves men to thanksgiving. Whatever has been our worship during the first part of this service, by God's grace it can be better in thanksgiving. He it is who created all things by His power and wisdom, who created us, who knows our weakness and flightiness. He showed us that greater love than any man has by laying His own life on the line for us in His Son, Jesus Christ. Our Savior He is. Our sin took His life. And our Savior's life, taken again by Him, is given to us in forgiveness and new strength. When the Holy Spirit leads us into all this truth and pours into our hearts the love of God, He gives the power and the willingness to thank Him. And this is exactly what our God is doing for us now as we hear again all He has done. Say *Deo gratias*! And in your supplications pray that God in His mercy is saying about you: "We need not worry that those men will be proud, stubborn, rough and tough, or will work against us . . . not any more."

Material submitted by
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