

Listening & Liturgy

The following are some reflections on how one might fully, consciously and actively participate in liturgical services, especially the Divine Liturgy. These thoughts are not primarily about doing the externals (the externals can be addressed by singing and saying the text, and following the rubrics in the text) but rather on the internal. One needs to keep in mind that this is a process: "a life time's death in love costing not less than everything".

- I need to listen attentively with and from the heart, since divine services consist of two harmonious but distinct aspects: listening to God's Word; and responding to God by worship.
- God speaks to us, calls us into being as church/ ecclesia by and through His Word. The church by listening to God is formed by God and responds to the Father through Christ in worship.
- God does not need me to listen to Him or to worship Him. The Holy Trinity is eternally in a complete and perfect relationship of Love. By creating through His Word, God has made Himself small. (The biblical term is kenosis.)
- I need to listen and worship because if I do not, I separate myself from God who is Love. I must first realize by experience that no human relationship, no acquisition of things, knowledge, or fame, etc. can or will give me what God offers. I come to God in my brokenness, in my emptiness, in my need to be loved and to love. If I can honestly see myself for who I am, then I will listen to God and cry out and worship Him. However, if I am trying to fill the emptiness, the loneliness with one of the many false gods of life, I may well have a difficult time trying to worship the one, true God.
- I must learn to listen to His Word so that His Word might dwell within my heart (the heart being a biblical metaphor for the whole person, body and soul, made in the image and likeness of God the Word, through whom all things come into being). The whole of scripture bears witness to this: the Father speaks His only-begotten Word from all eternity, and through this Word all things are made. God calls us by His Word – this Word is none other than the Father's only-begotten Son who is the perfect image of the Father. The Word is a Person from all eternity: the Word became flesh and dwelt among us.
- To listen attentively to God's Word is to listen to the very Person of the Son of God. I encounter God only when I listen. To know and love God, I

must first listen to God. To listen to God and to worship God is to enter into the deepest personal relationship possible. Yet, I have to know I need this relationship and that I am willing to make myself small, to enter into kenosis, in order to encounter God. This is true of any human relationship that is one of authentic love – to love someone, I have to become less. I need to let go of the false self, the sinful self that I so seldom recognize (but if I just ask someone else about my sinful self, another will see it all too clearly). I need to become small in order to receive the other person into my life and paradoxical I become greater when I become small.



- It is not possible to listen if I am trying to get my words in, trying to make my point known. This unfortunately is the usual mode of human communication. He or she who speaks loudest or has the most power wins. Of course this is a human delusion that destroys any authentic human communion. I don't listen to the other because I am afraid to change, for to really love another is to allow myself to be changed. So often human conversation is trivial, the exchange of pleasantries without any revelation of self,

without any listening to the other, without any real connection. Silence is more efficacious than the vast majority of empty conversations humans have. I have these empty conversations because I am deeply afraid of change.

- Before I can enter into a real authentic relationship with God, I need to learn to listen to myself and to my fellow human beings with care, compassion and love. I need to enter into real conversation, real encounter which means real change.



- In a culture filled with noise, to listen is certainly counter-cultural. (Our culture is very noisy.) Yet, I cannot know God, if I will not listen to God. To encounter another person requires listening. It requires me to put myself aside, to drop my prejudices, to be open to whom the other really and truly is – not my ideas or imaginings about them. To listen to God requires putting my will aside or rather conforming my will to God's will. God's will is always for the good, the truth, the real; I know that my will can frequently be sinful. If I cannot listen to God, I cannot worship, know and love God.

What can I do to develop the art of listening?

- learn [Lectio Divina](#) (click [here](#) for more information)
- learn to sit in silence for 5-10 minutes a day as a minimum



- (c) learn to memorize short scriptural passages: let God's Word seep into my heart like water than nourishes the soil
- (d) I need to repeat the above over and over again, it is a process that has no end – it is an endless falling in love
- (e) when I read the Scriptures in divine services I need to put at least the same effort into listening as a good musician would put into a concerto
- (f) in the divine services read the Scriptures with utmost reverence and dignity which is exemplified through ritual actions – the way I sit, stand, cross myself, etc.
- (g) in divine services sing the Scriptures for singing reinforces the Word within the heart
- (h) In order to worship God which is the second aspect of Divine services following upon listening to the Word of God, I need to develop an attitude of worship.

- An attitude of worship puts God first and foremost. What are the false gods in my life? A few of the false gods: material goods, wealth, comfort, sex, fame, food, drink, knowledge, beauty, myself, country, ethnicity, religion, health, youth, friendship, etc. and it goes on and on... Do I really trust God to care for me, to love me? Where will all these false gods be in eternity?
- An attitude of worship is expressed from the heart from the depth of my being through my body.

I can learn how to worship by:

- (a) putting the false gods aside, don't set my heart on them, don't trust in them, don't focus my identity on them, let them go so I can be free to worship the real, true God
- (b) learning the ritual actions and verbal responses of the liturgical tradition; learn them so well they become part of myself on a daily basis

- (c) learning to express reverence both verbally and bodily as part of my daily life – this can be taught and should be modelled
- (d) beginning every activity with both prayer and silence
- (e) avoiding a pro forma approach to worship – let prayer be an act of love

In all that we do in worship, let us join ourselves to Christ for it is only in Christ that true, real worship exists. God asks of us something we cannot do on our own, but we can do it in Christ for He is our strength and our salvation. We are part of His Body. We have an Advocate; the Holy Spirit who dwells in the depths of the heart. The Son and the Holy Spirit are the primary persons in worship for they continually glorify the Father. When united to the Son and the Holy Spirit, we learn to listen to the Father and glorify Him.

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