

TRINITY NEWS

WEEK 35.
August 27, 2023
Proper 16

Notes on the Liturgy Revisited

Stand, kneel, sit

To ensure that our whole body is involved, our worship includes what some have called, liturgical calisthenics: we are constantly changing position, from sitting to standing, to kneeling, back to standing, then back to sitting and so on and so forth throughout the service. These actions are of course not arbitrary; they follow a rule that was drummed into us at a young age: we stand for praise, sit for instruction, and kneel for prayer. At Holy Trinity we still follow this rule for the most part, but in the wider Anglican (and Roman Catholic) world, that's not always the case these days.

As usual, the 'trouble' began back in the liturgical reforms that swept Western Christendom in the 1960s and 70s. On the one hand there was a general de-emphasizing of the penitential elements in the liturgy (with which kneeling was associated) and on the other, the reformers reminded us that the First Ecumenical Council of Nicaea (325AD) – the people who gave us the Nicene Creed) expressly forbade kneeling at Sunday worship which, they held, as a weekly commemoration of Christ's Resurrection, was one continual act of praise – a rule that still holds in the Eastern Orthodox Church. (They don't even have pews in traditional Orthodox churches – just a few benches for the elderly who find standing through the 3-hour liturgy a bit taxing.)

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“Put into sincere prayer the amount of effort you do into a game or into your business and you will prevail.”

Charles Henry Brent, 1929

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Well, since standing is generally more comfortable than kneeling, a lot of people took that to heart, and standing for prayers became common in the Roman Catholic Church and many Anglican congregations. In many of our local congregations for example, even if they have kneelers, they are not often used. Either position is now acceptable, though you should generally follow the custom of the parish you find yourself in.

A couple of points - You notice that we sit for most readings (instruction) but stand for the Gospel. The Gospel is not a reading so much as it is a proclamation, an act of praise. Also, the general rule is that if you can't kneel for prayer, you should stand; however, for some that can also be difficult, plus it can feel awkward to be the only one standing, so sitting is permitted.



SAINTS OF THE WEEK:

Monica, Mother of Augustine of Hippo, 27 August. Monica was born in North Africa of Christian parents in 332 and she was married to a pagan named Patricius, whom she converted to Christianity. They had three children of whom the most famous was her eldest child, the future Augustine. Indeed, Augustine ascribed his conversion to the example and devotion of his mother: "She never let me out of her prayers that you, O God, might say to the widow's son 'Young man, I tell you arise'" -- which is why the gospel of the widow of Nain is traditionally read today as her memorial. Monica's husband died when she was forty. Her desire had been to be buried alongside him, but this was not to be. She died in Italy, at Ostia, in 387 on her way home to North Africa with her two sons.

The Martyrs of Papua New Guinea, 2 September. The church in Papua New Guinea has been enriched by martyrdom twice in the twentieth century. James Chalmers, Oliver Tomkins and some companions were sent to New Guinea by the London Missionary Society. They met their death by martyrdom in 1901. Forty years later, during the Second World War, New Guinea was occupied by the Imperial Japanese Army and Christians were severely persecuted. Among those who died for the faith were two English priests, Vivian Redlich and John Barge, who remained with their people after the invasion of 1942 but were betrayed and beheaded, together with seven Australians and two Papuan evangelists, Leslie Gariadi and Lucian Tapiedi.