



Rhythms of grace

In the ebb and flow of liturgy, God is at work, whether we hear him or not.



by
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Crying for mercy, singing of glory

What strange beings we humans are! What contradictory creatures!

On the one hand, we are weak, fallible and dependent. It takes very little to upset us; it takes only a little more to threaten our very existence. Despite our technological sophistication, trouble and death are never far away. No wonder there are times when we instinctively cry out, 'Lord, have mercy!' And yet that is only half the story. Behind the facade of this fragile life, we sense something glorious. Beyond the silence of the universe, we hear a rumour of angels. In fact, some have already glimpsed it! (Luke 2:13,14; Revelation 4)

How fitting that our liturgy expresses these twin poles of the Christian life, the cry for mercy and our hope of glory!

'Lord, have mercy!' is a beggar's cry, recalling those gospel stories where people appealed to Jesus for help of every kind (Matthew 9:27, 15:22; Luke 17:13). Rather than a prayer for forgiveness, it is a request for help in **any** conceivable human need. In these words, we hold our begging-bowls before God, expressed by the pastor's outstretched arms and upturned hands. Usually these needs are not spelled out; however, in some liturgies the plea for mercy accompanies specific intentions: 'for the peace of the whole world, for the wellbeing of the church of God, for the unity of all'. This reminds us that we look beyond our own need for mercy to the concerns of the wider

world. In the 'Lord, have mercy!' we exercise our role as the priesthood of believers, and stand in solidarity with the whole human race. It is our act of 'public service', calling to mind the original meaning of the word 'liturgy'.

But if the 'Lord, have mercy!' comes from the depths of our earthly plight, the 'Glory to God' lifts us up to heaven. 'We praise you, we bless you, we worship you, we glorify you': this is the language of angels who behold God face to face. And we are invited to join in! By singing God's glory here on earth, we now share in the heavenly glory to come. Just as Jesus brought God's glory into our mortal life, so he enables us to participate in his divine life. And unlike the prayer for mercy, which serves a practical purpose, the language of glory serves no purpose other than its own: we adore God's glory, simply because God **is** glorious! In a world of means and ends, the angelic hymn calls us beyond pragmatism, to simply **be** in the presence of God and the holy ones.

In the liturgy we cry for mercy and we sing of glory. But the cry and the song flow out of the liturgy into our daily lives. Having prayed for mercy, we now seek to be merciful in all our doings. And when we have sung God's glory, created life is no longer an end in itself, but transparent to the presence of God who calls us to his glory.

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