



Why do things seem so fixed and structured in the worship at St Paul's?

The Episcopal Church—and all the national Anglican Churches worldwide as well as all the other branches of the Catholic Church: Roman, Eastern Orthodox, Old Catholic, and Oriental—are liturgical Churches. “Public worship” on a Sunday or weekday Holy Day must be celebrated using the official liturgy of the Church.

This is a matter of Canon Law, violations of which are punishable by the Bishop of the diocese. In the Diocese of Chicago, at his discretion, the Bishop may take over any parish, dissolve its canonical and legal structure including the Vestry, and seize all of the parish's assets for a wide variety of reasons, including liturgical ones. (This is not just a theoretical threat. In recent years the Ordinary [diocesan bishop] has taken over several parishes for failure to observe the Church's norms and his directives).

The official liturgy of the Church includes:

- The **text of the Eucharistic liturgy** itself as well as the requirement that the celebration of the Sacrament of the Eucharist be the principal act of worship for all Members in Good Standing of the Church on all Sundays and major weekday Holy Days.
- The **prescribed Lectionary** (i.e. the assigned Biblical Readings for each Sunday and Holy Day) which must be used.
- The **historic Church Year** which must be observed (e.g. all parishes must celebrate the respective Sunday of Easter on the second Sunday of May; they may not celebrate Mothers' Day as many Protestant churches do...Christmas begins at sundown on December 24th and lasts for 12 days).
- The **music of the liturgy** which must be “liturgical,” i.e. texts must be theologically sound, and they must reflect the themes of the assigned Readings and the day of the Church Year...“O come all ye faithful” may not be sung on Good Friday and “Alone thou goest forth to die” may not be sung on Christmas Eve...Christmas music may not be used in Advent...show tunes or other pop music may not be used in the liturgy, including weddings and funerals. Individual preference or sentimentality may not be the criterion for the choice of music in the liturgy.
- **Ceremonial** which embodies and communicates the Church's historic norms and doctrinal teaching (i.e. the public worship of the Church on a Sunday or major weekday Holy Day may not look like a fundamentalist revival, a Charismatic prayer meeting, or casual worship in someone's living room...“unity candles” may not be used at weddings...the coffin must be closed before coming to the church for a funeral and must remain closed).
- The **homily** which is to be “an act of worship:” an integral and completely integrated element of the liturgy, making the Readings and prescribed theme “come alive.” It is not to be an occasion for individual emotional inspiration or intellectual doctrinal/Biblical instruction except occa-

sionally in very special circumstances, nor may it be a central “show piece” which dominates the liturgy and overshadows the celebration of the Eucharist.

Canon Law prescribes that the Rector of the parish, under the Bishop of the diocese, is the sole and final authority in all liturgical matters.

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The liturgy and how it is celebrated is a very serious matter in Anglican life, theology, and Canon Law because:

- Liturgical worship was the pattern of worship in Judaism at the time of Jesus Christ, and the New Testament records that it is the type of public worship that Our Lord specifically prescribed for His Church.
- It is the type of worship that best does what the historic Christian Church intends to do when it gathers on Sundays and major Holy Days, i.e. worship sacramentally and corporately. It is not an occasion for individual emotional “inspiration” or intellectual doctrinal/Biblical exegesis as is often the case in Protestant churches. (Those we are to do at retreats or renewal programs and in education classes.)
- Like the Early Christian Church, for Anglicanism the Church’s official liturgy is an official statement of its doctrine: “*lex orandi, lex credendi*” (i.e. if you want to know what the Church teaches about the Eucharist, for example, you read the Eucharistic liturgy and its authoritative directions [rubrics]...thus in Anglicanism bad liturgy can literally be heretical).

When I was growing up in the Episcopal Church back in the 19__’s at _____ things were structured but were not as rigidly defined as this. Why are things so inflexible now?

There is no getting around it; things are more clearly defined now. After the Liturgical Movement (i.e. the call for the back-to-roots return to Early Christian liturgy) of the first part of the 20th century and its implementation by the Second Vatican Council of the Roman Catholic Church, the Lambeth Conference of Anglican Bishops (1958 and 1968) and the General Convention of the American Episcopal Church (1976 and 1979) said in effect that we are, and always have been, an historic Catholic Church with historic Catholic theology and historic Catholic liturgy; and Anglicans need to worship that way because “praying shapes belief.” “Rigid?” Maybe, but, in effect, the Primates, Archbishops, and Diocesan Bishops of the Anglican Communion worldwide have said that’s the way it is here!