



**I like to have the choir and clergy process up the center aisle at the beginning of the service—and back down at the end of the service—singing a hymn and being led by a processional cross. Why don't we do this at St Paul's?**

The renowned 20th Century Anglican liturgist and scholar, the Rev. Percy Dearmer, speaks to this question in his highly regarded “magnum opus” *The Parson's Handbook*:

Seventh edition: Chapter VIII / Processions

The procession is a distinct, significant act of worship: it is not an aimless walk round the church; but it has a definite object, such as the Rood or the Font.

A procession is not the triumphant entry and exit of the choir, nor is any such thing known to the Church as a “recessional.” Properly, the choir should go quietly to their places when they arrive, and occupy the time before the service with prayer and recollectedness in the stalls, instead of chatting in the vestry. If, however, they go in all together in processional order, no hymn should be sung, nor should there be any special hymn to accompany their return; and, above all, no cross should be carried. They should be well settled in their places before the ministers enter.

There were anciently several distinct processions in connexion [sic] with the Eucharist in the English Church. The three principal were: (1) The solemn procession before the service, not from the vestry, but from the choir, round the church to the Rood and Altar. (2) The procession to the lectern for the Gospel. (3) The offertory procession—a very ancient ceremony—when the sacred vessels were carried in. There were also many special processions, as that to the Font at Easter.

Thirteenth edition: Chapter 8 / Processions

A procession before a church service is a popular feature of modern Anglican worship. Unfortunately the rationale which lies behind such a ceremony is frequently misunderstood, even by some who are in Holy Orders and are responsible for ordering the conduct of the services of the Book of common Prayer. There is no kind of authority, either ancient or modern, for services to be preceded by an aimless walk from the choir vestry by the longest route to the choir-stalls with the ministers and choir singing a hymn. If a robed choir enters the church from the vestry as a body and not one at a time, it should do so by the shortest route and without undue ceremony or any singing and it should not be preceded by a server carrying a processional cross. Nor is there any Anglican or ancient precedent for the singing of a “recessional” as the choir leaves the stalls at the end of a service. This unfortunate piece of “ritualism” has been copied by other Churches of the Anglican Communion and it is very fashionable in Canada and the United States.

The Book of Common Prayer provides for a number of occasions for processions to take place; and it will be obvious that these ceremonies have a definite end in view.

On the greater festivals there can be a procession before the chief Eucharist of the day and the *English Hymnal* provides a series of hymns and proses [*sic*] for such occasions. The procession may start from the High Altar, or from one of the side chapels in a very large church. The officiant will be at the front of the procession and not at the rear, since he is to say or sing the Collects at the stations or halts, which are an essential part of such a procession.

At Christmas there will be a station at the crib, at Easter at the font, and at other times at the rood. All such processions will terminate at the High Altar, where the final Collect will be said. It will thus be seen that a properly ordered procession is in the nature of a pilgrimage, not merely a choral walk round the church. Whatever the occasion of a procession it should always have some end in view, since its object is to go somewhere to pray and worship.

**But choir and clergy coming and leaving like that is so pretty and so meaningful to me.**

The Rev. Dr John Macquarrie, universally acknowledged as the premier Anglican theologian of the second half of the 20th Century, wrote in *Paths in Spirituality*:

[All Liturgical Theologians] would say—and they would be right about this—that one cannot justify an act of worship on the grounds of personal preference or what it has meant in one's own personal history, and that one cannot even justify it in terms of its meeting general psychological needs, and even still less on the grounds of aesthetic excellence. [It must be shown that a] particular act of devotion has a sound theological basis.

Several years ago in response to a question about liturgical decision-making at St Paul's, Father Fraser wrote in a **Q+A**:

Canon Law in the Episcopal Church prescribes that the Rector of the parish alone under the Bishop is the final authority in all liturgical matters.

In November 1974 when Father Richard Lundberg, St Paul's Rector, had been appointed to a new parish, Bishop Montgomery asked me to come talk with the Vestry and other leadership persons.

The 1970's in the Episcopal Church were a period of liturgical revision and the development of a new prayer book. It was a time of acrimonious controversy and bitter divisiveness in the Church on all levels. It was very natural that St Paul's lay leaders asked what I would do about the liturgy if I were appointed Rector.

My answer was that as Rector of St Paul's—or any parish, for that matter—I would try to provide the type of liturgy that best met the needs of the majority of people who came to a given Mass on a Sunday-by-Sunday basis as long as it was:

- sacramentally Catholic and theologically orthodox
- *done with integrity in one of the historic liturgical traditions* [emphasis added]
- corporate, i.e. incorporated the whole congregation

In other words, Father Fraser said that during his rectorate all public parish liturgy had to meet the highest standards of Catholic theology: of Sacramental Theology, of Dogmatic Theology, and of Liturgical Theology (the theology that the rite [words] and ceremony of the liturgy embody and articulate). Almost 40 years later this continues to be the Rector's position and unwavering policy.

In describing the Anglican understanding of Christian Faith and Life, the Primates, Archbishops, and diocesan Bishops of the Anglican Communion world-wide gathered at the 1988 Lambeth Conference said, "While all true religion touches emotions, *theology* is the foundation upon which everything else is built."