

Grace Notes in Miniature

Friday, January 15th, 2021

Dear friends,

I have always felt the transition from the Christmas Season to Ordinary Time to be horribly abrupt – and unfortunate that, at a time of year which is often dull and colourless, we suddenly lose all the brightness and colour of Christmas. Last Sunday, as one of the five people in our parish church because I was involved in live-streaming the liturgy, I helped to take down the Christmas decorations and was quite shocked at how quickly the church was transformed back into ordinary status. That got me reflecting on the label we use for this block of time. While other Christian denominations may have Epiphanytide (ending February 2nd for Anglicans and lasting until Lent for others) and count the Sundays after Pentecost or Trinity Sunday as a season, we stalwartly proclaim Ordinary Time.

This word, ordinary, is generally perceived as meaning plain, common, unremarkable, uninteresting, even deficient, inferior or boring, and we can view this liturgical season that way too if we don't recognise the richness in it. It is in Ordinary Time that we learn from Jesus on a daily basis, teaching us the steady, smaller lessons about what it means to be his followers. Far from meaning plain, the designation refers to the tracking of these Sundays and weeks using "ordinal numbers" – the numbers we use to identify sequence. Both the word, "ordinary" and the word, "ordination" come from the same Latin root, "ordinare" meaning to put in order.



So...why is The Baptism of the Lord the last Sunday in the Christmas Season, yet the following week is the Second Sunday in Ordinary Time? If you looked at the titles in a daily missalette, you would have noticed that the first day of this week after The Baptism of the Lord was identified as the First Monday in Ordinary Time. In spite of our sometimes referring to Sunday as the Sabbath (meaning seventh day and reflecting the day God rested after creation), we do consider Sunday to be the first day of the week (see Mark 16:1-2, John 20: 1-2). With that in mind, this Sunday is the beginning of the second week after the end of the Christmas season.



This Sunday, we are introduced to Jesus as the Lamb of God, the title John uses when he sees Jesus going by and which motivates the first two disciples to follow him.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FP8oOvGed-8>

The concept of Jesus as the Lamb of God is one which has been discussed and argued by scholars for many years, some taking the view that Jesus symbolizes the scapegoat referred to in Leviticus, being offered up in atonement for the sins of the world; the paschal (Passover) lamb of Exodus is another parallel; whilst others reject any idea of unwitting sacrifice seeing in Jesus an agent of God who willingly offers himself. In all cases, it is agreed that the spotless lamb signifies one who is innocent and meekly accepts his fate. We also hear of being washed in the blood of the Lamb (Revelation 7:14) the blood taking on a similar cleansing purpose to the waters of baptism.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=SDqTENTNvKQ>

The Week of Prayer for Christian Unity begins on Monday, January 18th and goes until the following Monday. There is a body of resources endorsed by the Canadian Council Of Churches (a broad and inclusive ecumenical body, now representing 26 member churches including Anglican; Eastern and Roman Catholic; Evangelical; Free Church; Eastern and Oriental Orthodox; and Historic Protestant traditions) to be found at <https://www.weekofprayer.ca/2021-wpcu-resources> These have been prepared by the Monastic Community of Grandchamp in Switzerland, a group of religious sisters from different church traditions brought together by a common vocation of prayer, community life, and hospitality and by their commitment to Christian unity. (<https://www.grandchamp.org/en/>)

At a time when we are aware of so many divisions and so much anger and suspicion in our world, the opportunity to pray together – even apart – is a chance to grow in faith and unity. The Living With Christ missalette offers an optional Mass for the Unity of Christians which can be offered on any of the days of this week. Although Mass is not an option in our schools at present, the Collect can be used with any of the Daily Readings for a Liturgy of the Word. It is included as an appendix to this GNIM.

Many blessings until next time,

Gillian



Collect

For the Unity of Christians

O God, who have united many nations in confessing your name, grant us, we pray, the grace to will and to do what you command, that the people called to your Kingdom may be one in the faith of their hearts and the homage of their deeds. Through our Lord Jesus Christ, your Son, who lives and reigns with you in the unity of the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever, Amen.

Or

Attend with favour to the prayers of your people, we ask, O Lord, and grant that the hearts of believers may be united in your praise and in repentance together, so that, with division among Christians overcome, we may hasten with joy to your eternal Kingdom in the perfect communion of the Church. Through our Lord Jesus Christ, your Son, who lives and reigns with you in the unity of the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever, Amen.

