



# Formed in the Faith

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Repetition is the mother of all learning. We are formed from cradle to grave as we are visited time and again by familiar words and actions. The formative power of repetition gives birth to rituals, a universal human phenomenon. Athletes have rituals that provide both physical and mental focus. Teachers employ rituals to inscribe paradigms and facts into the minds of students. Many rituals seize upon the power of music to cement content in persons. The formative power of rituals is so pervasive that rituals are utilized for mindless, yet critical, tasks (brushing your teeth) as well as solemn, once-in-a-lifetime moments (wedding vows).

We are all formed by rituals. The questions to be answered are: what rituals are forming you? To what end are they forming you? The apostle Paul gives instruction regarding what is to form the Church. “Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly, teaching and instructing each other in all wisdom by psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs...” (Colossians 3:16). The faithful are formed by the word of Christ with its formative power magnified by music (psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs).

The whole of Scripture is formative, yet Scripture has a specific focus toward which formation is aimed, namely, faith in Christ. Thus, the Church gives heightened attention to those passage of Scripture that form us in the central teachings of Scripture. This is seen in what the Church has chosen to regularly repeat in order to form us in faith.

- The repeated use of the invocation (weekly in the Divine Service, daily in Morning and Evening Prayer) forms in us who God is (Father, Son, and Holy Spirit) but also who we are as those who have been given that name in Holy Baptism.
- The repeated use of confession and absolution (weekly in the Divine Service) forms in us repentance, both contrition for our sin and faith that in Christ we are forgiven.
- The repeated use of assigned readings from Old Testament, Epistle, Gospel, and Psalms (weekly in the Divine Service but also in daily lectionary) forms us to listen to what God would say rather than simply search for what we want to hear.
- The repeated use (weekly in the Divine Service) of the Creed forms us to know who God is and what He has done for us. This is more than intellectual knowledge; it is faith. The regular recitation of the content of the Christian faith (*fides quae creditur*) forms in us trust (*fides qua creditur*).
- The repeated use (weekly in the Divine Service) of the proclamation of Law and Gospel forms us to listen to God’s Word for its just demands upon us and its condemnation of us for failing to meet those demands even as we are formed to listen even more for the promise of forgiveness for the sake of Christ.
- The repeated use (weekly or even daily) of the Lord’s Prayer forms our mouth and mind for prayer. Similarly, the repeated form of the Prayer of the Church that moves from the



needs of the Church to the temporal needs of the world to the specific needs of those gathered forms in us self-understanding as members of the Church catholic, the world, and a specific congregation.

- The repeated use (weekly in the Divine Service) of the Lord's Supper forms us to taste and see that the Lord is good.
- The repeated use (weekly in the Divine Service) of the benediction forms us to trust that as God has fed us in the Divine Service so He promises to bless and carry us through the week.
- The repeated use of actions even to the point of muscle memory forms us. The making of the sign of the cross (weekly in the Divine Service, daily within Morning and Evening Prayer) forms us as those living under the cross. The rhythmic standing and kneeling of the Divine Service forms us in reverence. Hands lifted or folded in prayer along with heads bowed form us to approach God in humility.
- The repeated use of music forms us by even channeling our emotions to match what God says rather than our emotions forming us to demand that God match our desires.

Ritual repetition forms us so well that a child engages in the Divine Service before she can read. The aged continue to engage even after they can no longer remember family.

In the Church we call such ritual liturgy. The historic order for the Church, repeated through the centuries, was not chosen at random, but purposefully to serve Scripture's primary purpose of forming us in the true faith that we might know what to expect from God.

Every congregation has liturgy because every congregation is comprised of humans (ritualistic beings). The historic order of the Divine Service has formed the faithful well, though it has not been mandated by Scripture in that specific form. Yet the lessons of its formative nature cannot be lost. Alternative liturgies are subject to the same questions: what rituals are forming the faithful? To what end are those rituals forming them?

For the Church, the first question must be answered, "rituals comprised of Scripture." The second question must be answered, "to saving faith in Christ." The answers are simple, but not simplistic. Forming ourselves by the word of God and dedicating ourselves to forming ourselves and others to saving faith demands the highest attention of the Church.