



**Saint Thomas Church Fifth Avenue
in the City of New York**

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www.SaintThomasChurch.org

Sunday, April 16, 2012
The Second Sunday of Easter (Low Sunday)

Festal Evensong
4pm

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A Sermon by
The Reverend J. Anthony Fletcher
Honorary Associate of Saint Thomas Church Fifth Avenue

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Sermon Series: "Lord, Teach Us to Pray"
SERMON 10: ADORATION AND PRAISE

"Worthy are you, our Lord and God, to receive glory and honour and power, for you created all things, and by your will they existed and were created" ¹

Today in our series of sermons on prayer we come to adoration and praise.

For several years I went to a Church Conference in England. We stayed in a Holiday Camp; for a chapel we had the converted ball-room. We had the usual programme of a daily Sung Eucharist and Morning and Evening Prayer and talks and Bible Study and general chatter. But the thing I remember most vividly was that each day at 12 noon we had an hour of silent prayer before the Blessed Sacrament. For those who are not familiar with this, what happens is that the consecrated host for communion is placed on the altar in a monstrance, which usually looks like a golden sunburst with a glass panel in the centre, which allows us to see the host as the focus for our devotions and our adoration. Several hundred people together in total silence with hardly a shuffle or a cough – was most impressive. I have long forgotten what the lectures were about, but that memory of the silent prayer of such a large group has remained with me as a source of inspiration.

So what is adoration? It is about acknowledging the relationship between oneself and God. It is about being honest with oneself and seeing the great gulf that lies between us, but knowing that in prayer we can cross that gulf. We realise the true greatness of God – we have a sense of his omnipotence and his glory, but also his approachability. We can come near to this awesome being – but in humility and not in rivalry or self-assertion.

Until a few years ago I had a sailing boat and one of my great memories was of being out at sea at night. There would be no lights around except the minimal lighting on the boat, and if the sky was clear, you got this fantastic display of the heavens, which we who live in towns and cities are deprived of. If you are a believer, then this demonstration of the wonders of the universe can only lead one to an overwhelming sense of the greatness of the God who created it all. Now this feeling would be common to all religions where there is a belief in a creator God. But Christianity does more. He is not only the Creator. He is also the Redeemer. He is the God

of the present and the future as well as the past – not only the source of our existence, but also the source of our hope.

Adoration is the one type of prayer that is both directed towards God and centred on him. Prayer for forgiveness is indeed directed towards God but it is largely centred on us and our failings. Intercession again is directed towards God, but is centred on the affairs of mankind and our own personal problems. In confession we come to God conscious of our sinfulness. In petition and intercession we come to God conscious of the needs of the world and ourselves. But in adoration we come to God simply conscious of our own insignificance when faced with the glory and the splendour and the wonder that is God.

Before prayer, there must come belief – at least the belief that God exists. Then, as our belief deepens, so will our prayer expand. If I did not believe that one of you existed, I could not praise that person. The better I know you, the more accurate and the more detailed will my praise be. It is the same with God – the more we understand him, the more meaningful will our praise be. When we praise a person, we do it because of who or what they are – something we admire; but we may also do it to boost their self-esteem and self-confidence, and sometimes what we say will not be entirely truthful. We can't play such games with God – he does not need any praise from us – he welcomes it, but he does not need it. We do it out of love – the generosity of our hearts responding to his love for us.

Another memory from my sailing days was of having a small sailing boat – a dinghy – and there were days when the wind was in just the right direction and of the right strength and the water was calm enough, that you would be going along as usual, when suddenly the boat would start to surf – it lifted up in the water and gathered speed. It brought this sense of exhilaration – sense of excitement, as you kept the boat steady and hardly dared to breathe. This is what adoration can do – it raises us up above the ordinary world of our words and our thoughts, and thrusts us into the conscious presence of God. Again we hardly dare to move or to breathe in case the moment passes and is lost for ever.

Adoration and praise can be a momentary lifting up of our heart in response to something – the silent uttering of a single word – or it can be a prolonged period of silent contemplation. We can use just one word, like 'Lord' or 'Jesus', and repeat them rhythmically as we let our thoughts centre on the mystery that is God. At the opposite extreme, the whole of the Eucharist is one great act of praise; but the point in the Eucharistic Prayer when the bell rings and first the host and then the chalice are raised up, that is the moment for adoration of Christ present to us in the Blessed Sacrament - that is the moment when we say in our hearts with our patron Saint Thomas – 'My Lord and my God', as we greet Christ truly present with us.

For an extended act of adoration we need to make preparations. We need to control our environment – no cell phone, no TV etc. - nothing intruding on our quiet. We should also think about our posture. Posture is an expression of our attitude. If we can, it is appropriate to kneel – if we can't kneel, then our mental attitude should be as if we were on our knees. We need quiet. We need to be comfortable. We need to be relaxed.

We often need something to trigger us – to get us started. We are all different – what suits one will not suit another. It is a time for experimentation. It is here that written prayers, or statues, or icons, or Bible readings, or natural events or works of beauty all play a part – anything that launches us into a true recognition of God and his wonder and splendour. The things themselves are not the aim or the end of the exercise – they are the starting point to take us out of ourselves and into contemplation of God. A crucifix may be beautiful or ugly, expensive or

cheap, but it can lead us to a contemplation, not of the thing itself, but of the Christ who died for us on that cross. A great painting of a religious theme can leave us contemplating the artist and his work, or it can bring us to the throne of God – it is the latter that we are seeking in our prayer – the contemplation of beauty as the creation and the gift of God. The same can be true of some natural phenomena, like storms and sunsets – they can also reduce us to a state of adoration.

What would be appropriate prayers to use for this? I don't want to give a sort of shopping list – these sermons are printed and I will add suggestions to the printed versionⁱ. But there are well-known prayers that you can find in virtually all Prayer Books and there are many passages of Scripture, especially the Psalms, that can help, and so can many of the hymns in our hymn-books.

There is a modern translation of the Magnificat – 'My soul glorifies the Lord, my spirit rejoices in God, my Saviour. He looks on his servant in her nothingness'ⁱⁱⁱ – it used to say – but because of possible misunderstanding it was changed to 'in her lowliness'. But in her nothingness is so much more to the point. I am not the centre of the universe – I am almost nothing – a few atoms in the vast expanse of time and space. Yet God loves me despite my insignificance and my sinfulness – he – loves – me; and I respond to him with my love, my adoration.

So what do adoration and praise achieve? They certainly don't alter God, but they do bring to us both a greater knowledge and appreciation of the glory of God and a deeper relationship with him, and, at the same time, they give us an increased sense of proportion in our lives of both our joys and our sorrows. We do it because it is the natural response to the wonder that is God. We may not reach the heights of Mount Carmel with Saint John of the Cross or of Mount La Verna with Saint Francis of Assisi, or attain to the third heaven with Saint Paul^{iv}, but we need to persevere and trust in God that he will let us at least some way into a true vision of his greatness and his glory. Amen.

ⁱ Revelation 4:11

ⁱⁱ Suitable verses from the Book of Revelation would be: ch7 vv11-12; ch4 v8; ch4 v11; ch15 vv3-3. There are many suitable Psalms: e.g. 8, 121, 134, 136, 139, 148, 150, the Hallel (Praise) Psalms 113 to 118. The full text for the Gloria in excelsis, the Sanctus (Holy, Holy, Holy) can be easily found in the Communion Service in all Prayer Books. The Te Deum, and the Glory be to the Father in Morning Prayer in Prayer Books. These can also be found by typing the title into your search engine on the internet.

Other suitable prayers would include, "We adore you, O Christ, and we bless you, because by your holy cross you have redeemed the world. Amen."

The Jesus Prayer: – 'Lord Jesus Christ, Son of God, have mercy on me'

The Eastern Trisagion – 'Holy God, Holy and strong, Holy and immortal, have mercy on me'

ⁱⁱⁱ Luke 1:46-48

^{iv} 2 Corinthians 12:2