

This is a less-formal manuscript than I normally create. I was not scheduled to preach this day, but our preacher had a serious medical emergency two days before.

" 'how much more will the heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit ↓ to those who ask' "

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"Common Prayer": phrase that is so familiar to us Epis'ns—indeed, sitting in every pew in this ch are books bearing this title—and probably in many of your homes ... and maybe your cars, offices and travel bags, as well

this isn't the occ'n to rehearse the whole Hx of the BCP—although, **teaser**: I will be teaching a class on the BCP, incl its Hx, on Tues morns, this fall—but the phrase "CP" was a significant, and *bold*, choice on the part of ABp Th Cranmer and the other leaders of the Eng Reform'n, for "Common" had, and *has*, at least three valents or important senses:

1. "Common" as in ACCESSIBLE: Anglican worship and prayer would be entirely in the vernacular ... the language people spoke in their homes and in the markets, rather than the rarefied M/E Latin of the clerical elite<sup>i</sup>; this was a *huge* break from the traditions of the Church—and one that the R/C Ch would not make for another 400 yrs<sup>ii</sup>
2. "Common" as in READILY AVAILABLE: Cranmer's idea—and *ideal*—in assembling and publishing the BCP was that every Xn in England (or, at least, those who were literate and had a few pennies in their pocket) could have a copy of the liturgies and prs of the Ch, to use at home: around the dinner table; at the spinning wheel and in the barn; and even out in the fields: Cranmer wrote movingly about the farmer hearing the ch bell ring to signal Morning Prayer<sup>iii</sup> and then halting his plow in mid-furrow, to take his BCP out of his pocket and pray the morning office
3. And "common" as in UNIVERSAL and CONSISTENT: The more "Reformed"—capital R—ideas of John Calvin and Huldrych Zwingli concerning proper worship emphasized the importance of extemporaneous pr<sup>iv</sup> and each pastor's crafting liturgy for the local church, in isolation, according to his—and it was always *his*—ideas of what was needful and appropriate. OTOH, the founders of Anglicanism saw not only order & uniformity, but also truth and spiritual formation in every parish's worshipping and pr'g the same way ... reading the same lessons ... and saying the same words, each Sunday.<sup>v</sup> This is a brilliant and powerful insight: that repetition, patterns, rhythms and thoughtful choices (made from an appointed set of variations) in liturgy, over time, combine to shape us spiritually: they mold us into an ever more God-shaped, Jesus-oriented, Holy Spirit-embracing Xns.<sup>vi</sup>

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And what of the "Prayer" of CP? why not "Common Worship"<sup>vii</sup> or "Common Praise"? after all, one of the chief reasons we come together as a body is to wp God ... to praise J for His mighty and merciful deeds.<sup>viii</sup> But "prayer" is somehow more fundamental—more elemental. It is quite literally, the language of *every Xn* ... the words and emotions; the praising and pleading; the thanking, the crying and even the cursing ... that we address to God, through X, our mediator, as we seek to invite God more and more into the interior of our lives ... and venture more and more into the interior of *God's* 'life'

Does it surprise you that Jesus prayed ... and prayed *a lot*? By one count, Jesus prays 12 separate times in the Gospel acc'g to St Lk, incl at His B'm, His T'fig'n, the L/S, on the Cross and when He

appr'd to the Ds after the Resurr'n. Now, if, as we believe, Jesus *is* God—God the Son; God Incarnate—why does He pray to the Father? Perhaps, I suppose, to set an example for us or to give us a window into His own inner thoughts, but this seems too didactic ... too 'neat' an explanation.

No, I believe J prays because, being fully human (as well as fully divine), He exps the distance we, too, sometimes feel from God ... He confronts calamities and emotions that threaten to overwhelm His soul ... He longs for the same guidance, direction and reassurance that we do ... He yearns to rest in the peace and goodness of God ~~ and to place in God' hands the sorrows and the fears and the needs and the dreams and the joys and the miracles that enter His—and our—lives, lest, without God's assistance ... without God's succor and companionship ... they become too much for our frail human frame to withstand; J prays, therefore, because this world is too big and unlovely for us to deal with on our own, and God is the *only* thing big enough and **love** enough to overcome it

J tells us, today, that we can, in prayer—and *only* in prayer—accomplish every good purpose, bear any grief and know true peace, if we will only but ask ... only but search ... only but knock—persistently, loudly, even—*nay, especially!*—in the middle of the night ... and tell God what we need and what we hope for; tell God what sustenance and help *others* need; tell God how much we love and how much we need to be loved; tell God where we hurt and confess how we have hurt others; tell God how thankful we are for all-and-every in our lives and how deeply devoted we are—and long to be—in our faith<sup>ix</sup>

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the words of the Lord's Prayer that Jesus teaches His Ds are the most common and the most pr'ful "common prayer" in all of Xn'ty: this pr has been used in the Ch's public worship since at least the 4C, but undoubtedly, those who had read it (or, more likely, heard it) took it up as part of their own pr life well before then<sup>x</sup>; it has been translated into countless languages ... adapted to a variety of cultures ... and prayed in bedrooms and at baptisms ... in graveyards and on ships-at-sea ... by vast congregations and solitary seekers ... for more than 2K years; and whatever the language, whatever the occasion, whatever the circumstances, ↓ its one *common* prayer was, and *is*, this: "Give us, O Father, what we ask, in faith. For we know that before we finish asking, You have already begun to answer us."

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<sup>i</sup> In fact, many of the clergy could not understand the Latin they prayed at every Mass. Often the humble parish priest had been trained only to read, phonetically, the words in the missal. Understanding what they meant—being aware of Latin usage and syntax—required attending a *grammar* school that was well beyond the means of most.

<sup>ii</sup> I note that not all Roman Catholics agree with this decision of the Second Vatican Council, and I appreciate their arguments from the perspective of both historicity/inherited patrimony and ritualism (*i.e.*, the other-ness of a Latin rite in a vernacular-speaking culture imparts additional spiritual 'value' to the rite). In the end, however, I am persuaded that the vast majority of the people in the gathered assembly participate more fully—*i.e.*, in a way that *they perceive* as participatory—when they actively comprehend and work to digest the language they hear and say during worship.

<sup>iii</sup> It is worth noting, in passing, that for many centuries—indeed, until the last third of the twentieth century—the overwhelming norm of Anglican worship on the Lord's Day was Morning Prayer, often (but not always) with the Liturgy of the Word (the Ante-Communion) of Holy Eucharist (with the Great Litany sandwiched in between). Communion was very rarely celebrated. Indeed, Anglicans were expected to receive communion only once a year, usually on Easter.

<sup>iv</sup> Two comments I would offer: First, I *very* much value the extemporaneous prayer, whether literally strung together in the moment or crafted at a desk in preparation for a given Sunday. If we never pray with specificity ... if we never utter before God the things that are most deeply affecting (for good or for ill) us and others ... we will have great difficulty creating and sustaining a meaningful relationship with God. Second, and somewhat contrariwise, the prescribed collects

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and fixed prayers of the *Book of Common Prayer* are not only helpful (*i.e.*, they can help us articulate what we intend and/or need to say to God) but also *formative*: When we pray them, we 'learn' (see note 6, below) *what* and *how* and *why* we believe. Though this is not their primary function, these prayers are, to a degree, catechetical, in that they help show us the ways Christians depend upon, are thankful to, praise, confess to and dedicate themselves to God, through Christ, in the power of the Holy Spirit.

<sup>v</sup> While the sixteenth century leaders of the English Reformation could not have foreseen the British Empire, the phrase "Common Prayer" has come to resound even more globally today, as the churches, scattered across six continents, that comprise the Anglican Communion all worship using their own Books of Common Prayer.

<sup>vi</sup> This is the anciently observed ... and more recently recovered ... maxim, *lex orandi, lex credendi (et lex vivendi* [as is sometimes appended]): roughly, so that the way we pray / worship may form the way we believe (and live). (More formally, and originally, the maxim runs, "*ut legem credendi lex statuat supplicandi.*")

<sup>vii</sup> Indeed, this is the title of the CoE's current set of supplemental texts to the Book of Common Prayer of 1662, which remains the most recently authorized edition in the Church of England. (Revision of the that prayer book requires and act of Parliament. The most recent effort to effect a revision failed in 1928. The Church of England, therefore, has taken up the practice of issuing supplemental (and, in my opinion, rich and thoughtful) liturgical materials that constitute, for all intents and purposes, the common liturgical practices of that church.)

<sup>viii</sup> See *Catechism, BCP*, p 857 ("What is corporate worship?"). I would, in fact, argue that the *preeminent* reason we gather for the Holy Eucharist is to know, experience and celebrate our union with the Holy Trinity, through Christ, but that is a (huge) topic for another day(s).

<sup>ix</sup> This is a (maybe not-so-) subtle rehearsal of the seven classical types of prayer: adoration, praise, petition, intercession, oblation, confession and thanksgiving. See, *e.g.*, *BCP*, pp 856-57.

<sup>x</sup> We know that the praying the Lord's Prayer was recommended by personal and monastic devotional manuals well before the Church incorporated it into the Mass. *The New Westminster Dictionary of Liturgy and Worship* (2002), *s.v.* *Lord's Prayer, The*.