Shaping Your Spiritual Discipline

Adult Education January 15, 2017 Saint Clare's Parish

One's first duty is adoration, and one's second duty is awe and only one's third duty is service. And that for those three things and nothing else, addressed to God and no one else, you and I and all other countless human creatures evolved upon the surface of this planet were created. We observe then that two of the three things for which our souls were made are matters of attitude, of relation: adoration and awe. Unless these two are right, the last of the triad, service, won't be right. Unless the whole of your...life is a movement of praise and adoration, unless it is instinct with awe, the work which the life produces won't be much good.

Evelyn Underhill

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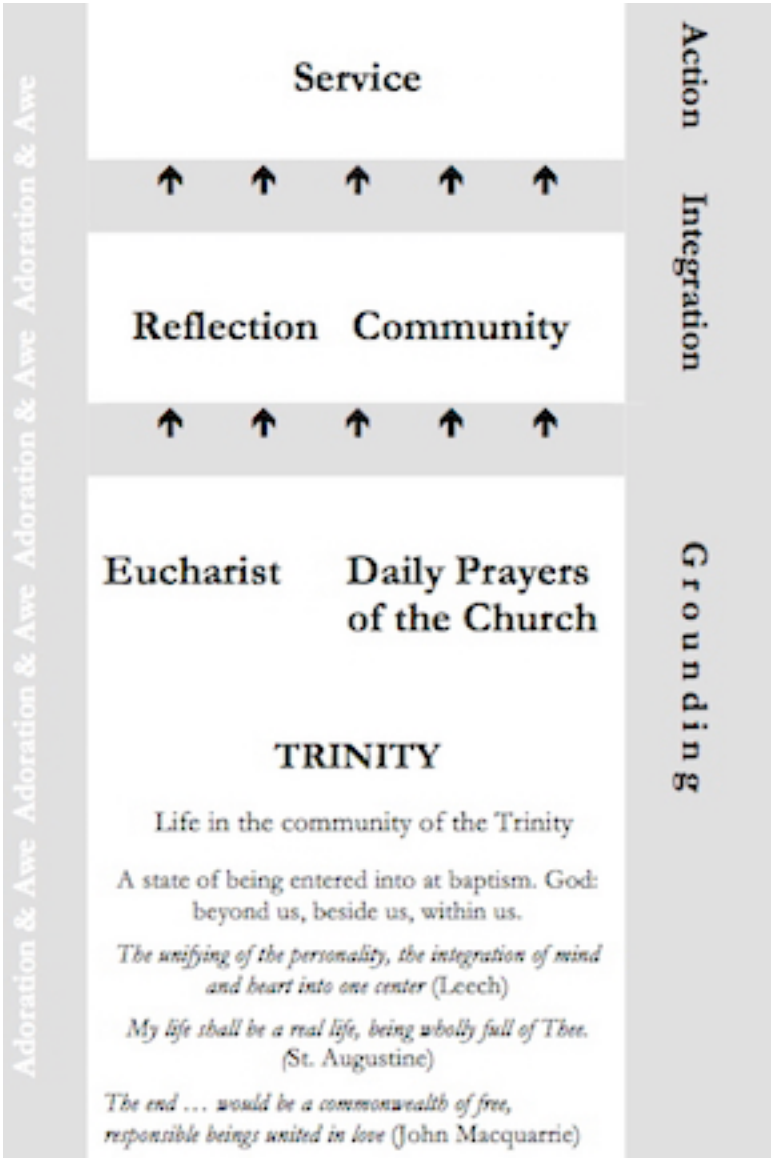
The "In Your Holy Spirit" Spiritual Map

One pattern of Anglican spiritual life is to see it as consisting of five core elements – Eucharist, Daily Office, Community, Reflection and Service. The assumption in this approach is that our service will show more of what Evelyn Underhill called the Divine Charity if it is grounded in the common prayer of the church.



From *In Your Holy Spirit*

Eucharist and Office: The Ground
Our life in community, our reflection, and our service are nurtured from the soil of Office and Eucharist. The daily connection with Scripture and common prayer and the weekly receiving of Body and Blood orient us to the ways of eternity and feed us for "real life." St. Paul must have observed a comparable set of practices. Paul also knew that it all was God's doing. "Likewise the Spirit helps us in our weakness; for we do not know how to pray as we ought, but that very Spirit intercedes with sighs too deep for words. And God, who searches the heart, knows what is the mind of the Spirit, because the Spirit intercedes for the saints according to the will of God." (Romans 8: 26 – 27).

Reflection & Community: Integration
Rising from the "ground" of Eucharist and Daily Office are two activities that serve to integrate life: reflection and community. The weekly practice of Eucharist, along with the daily practice of Office, familiarize us with the ways of heaven. Abraham Heschel saw worship as "a way of seeing the world in the light of God." Community and reflection are part of what makes life whole. What we have become acclimated to in worship, the habits of good liturgy (listening, engagement, patience, and so on), shape our contemplation and are enfleshed in our life with others.

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Assumptions about our spiritual life

1. We all have a spiritual life.
2. It is a significant act of spiritual growth when we accept responsibility for our spiritual life.
3. A healthy spiritual life assumes engagement, rather than escape; an interest in the life of the world instead of spiritual sentimentality or being caught up in illusions.
4. We are seeking a spiritual practice with roots in ancient ways and useful in modern life.
5. We need a spirituality that is both solid and resilient.
6. Our spiritual life serves us best when we understand that it is to evolve over time. What serves us when we are 11 differs from when we are 18 and still again from when we are 35 or 60. A fertile evolution unfolds out of forms of spiritual life that are complex, rich, and paradoxical. They continue to grow as we increase our self-awareness, insight, and in response to changing circumstances.
7. It requires efficiency if it is to serve modern daily life.
8. It requires attention and time if it is to serve modern daily life.
9. Our spiritual life and discipline is to be based on an integrated system, a pattern, rather than series of random practices. We are to live our spiritual life by Rule, not rules.
10. It is possible for the average church member to become competent and proficient in spiritual practices.
11. We must decide to base our spiritual life on persistence, courage, and competence, rather than on feelings—whether we feel like praying or not. A useful and faithful spiritual life requires critical reasoning and intelligences. We need to intentionally turn away from spiritual fads and fast food.
12. The parish church's primary task is the spiritual formation of its people.

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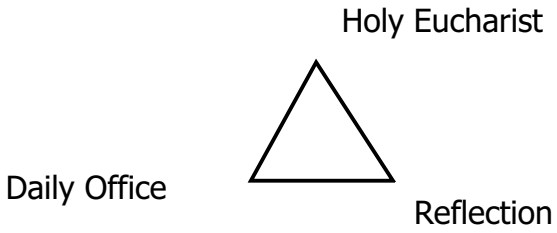
A Renewal Pathway

Give them an inquiring and discerning heart, the courage to will and to persevere, a spirit to know and to love you, and the gift of joy and wonder in all your works.

The Book of Common Prayer

How are we to grow into such a person? How will we develop such characteristics?



There is a traditional Anglican spiritual map called the threefold rule of prayer. It's also been called the Benedictine Triangle. It's usually presented as Eucharist – Daily Office – Personal Devotions. Father Martin Thornton wrote several books in the 50's and 60's that explored this approach to spiritual life. As Fr. Thornton aged, and as the culture changed, he found himself wondering if the real need of society was for one aspect of personal devotions – reflection. His assumption was that to serve God in the modern world required us to contemplate, ponder, and prayerfully think about the issues and dynamics of life.

This is a broad overview of an approach that a Christian in the Anglican (Episcopal) tradition might take in shaping a contemporary and rooted spiritual disciple.

General thoughts

- Our pathway is in response to, and in cooperation with, God's love and presence
- The objective: To live in Christ and for Christ to live in use; Holy Worldliness; habitual recollection. We seek maturity in Christ, to live as mature Christians in daily life
    - Not a state of being that once arrived at just continues on; but a state of being requiring the humility of living within the Body of Christ with its dependence on life in community. The core cycle of renewal – apostolate continues at all stages of Christian maturity.
    - Maturity is marked by an increased consistency of personality in which the person is brought into harmony, is reintegrated, as the whole being is concentrated on God. There are two aspects of this harmony I'd highlight – 1). Remembering who we are, i.e., baptized members of the Body of Christ, instruments of his love and 2). Emotional stability; a capacity to be centered; emotional intelligence.
- This maturity is the result of living within the Body of Christ; living in its rhythms, being feed by its sacraments and the organic life of the Body. Christian maturity is the product of persistence in living a disciplined response to God's love.

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The "best" pathway into maturity will be shaped as we take into account:

- The tradition of the church – what we as a Body have learned about the process of sanctification
- Differences in personality – while all may need certain common foods to nurture us, we will also be feed by taking into account our own particular needs
- The culture and age we live in – Some ages and cultures carry and support us more than others; some require more self-consciousness, responsibility and discipline.

A Pattern

What we'd suggest for most of us who live in a modern and/or postmodern culture and age, when we are not automatically reinforced by our culture, is something along these lines --

1. **Eucharist and Daily Office**
   This is the source of our frequent and regular participation in the rhythms of the Body of Christ – Eucharist once/week. Office with psalm, reading and the prayers on 3 - 4 days+ of the week; some more limited participation in the Office on the other days.

2. **Disciplined ways of reflecting**
   We need ways that allow us: a). to reflect on our experience in relationship to who we are as baptized members of the Body; b). to draw learnings from that reflection on experience; and c). to act on those learnings with the behaviors of new life.

   Three disciplines need for everyone pursuing maturity
   - Prayer that brings the stuff of our life into conscious relationship with Jesus Christ, in a manner that allows us to be reflective about our life, e.g., meditation, *lectio divina*
   - Spiritual guidance – working with another person; in groups, yearly retreat, one-to-one
   - Prayer that develops our capacity for stillness and silence; our ability to listen to God, others, our self.

3. **Other disciplines useful for you**
   It may be that nothing else is needed beyond the core pattern of Eucharist, Office and disciplined, reflective prayer.

   There are all sorts of devotions that might enhance and supplement the core.

Experiment

The way to find the pattern that best serve you at this time in your life, that fits your temperament, and your current state of maturity – is by experimenting and reflecting on what you have tried.

For some of us it is a new idea that we are responsible for our own spiritual life; especially with the thought that we actually may need to change our behavior and values as part of that responsibility. On the journey into maturity we will/may find ourselves needing different things at different times.

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