



Absence Makes the Heart Grow Fonder

Sitting in church recently, I found myself thinking about the high holy feasts and seasons of the liturgical year. In lower church traditions, people are well aware of the days of Easter and Pentecost. They are specific celebration days. But these are also seasons in the Church year that last for several weeks.

The ebb and flow that these celebrations and seasons demonstrate is essential when we think about the use of art in worship. Not every Sunday in the season of Easter is Easter proper. The biggest celebration is reserved for that one specific day, and yet we recall the resurrection of Christ each Sunday by the very fact that (most) communal Christian worship has been moved to Sunday from Saturday.

We would actually get bored with the pomp reserved for Christmas and Easter if it was seen every Sunday. Maybe bored is the wrong word. Jaded might be better. When we grow accustomed to extravagance we take it for granted and it loses its significance. But there is still a place for extravagance. Jesus himself fully approved of his anointing with perfume, claiming that it was a preparation for his burial. He did not, however, approve of that kind of expensive display on a daily basis. That was highly impractical and the act would have lost its significance had it been repeated often.

The same can be said of the use of art in worship—in all its forms. It is impractical to mount a costly and extravagant liturgical art installation every Sunday. But there is a place for it. Quality work takes time and resources. There isn't a congregation anywhere that can, weekly, pour money into a new liturgical art project. The artists don't have the time, the money can better be spent on a variety of ministries, and the congregation will lose a sense of awe from the repetition.

This idea of fasts, feasts, and seasons must form our thoughts about how to use the visual in worship. Some churches can actually learn quite a bit from the practice of fasting. A church that incorporates well-planned and articulated *Powerpoint* imagery, to enhance the slides of chorus texts projected on the wall, may inadvertently be visually overloading their worshippers. Stripping the imagery away for a time will heighten the senses of those in the Body so that they can better appreciate imagery when it is used.

Those churches that never utilize artwork could do simple and inexpensive things to better form the worship of their congregations. A change of color in the fabric covering the altar or communion table is a simple and bold statement. It doesn't even need to connect with the colors of the liturgical seasons. These color changes, at appropriate times, sensitize worshippers in deep ways that they might not even be able to express.

As pastors and artists, looking to the long traditions of the church will guide us as we update the forms of worship in our current period.