



THE  
EXPERIENCE  
OF WORSHIP  
IN LATE MEDIEVAL  
CATHEDRAL AND  
PARISH CHURCH

ENACTMENTS OF LADY MASS AND VESPERS  
AT ST TEILO'S CHURCH, 20-24 JUNE 2011

ST FAGANS NATIONAL HISTORY MUSEUM, CARDIFF

NOTES ON PREPARING FOR THE WEEK



## *Preparing for the week in St Fagans: a short note, and some necessary (not over-extensive) reading*

Those of you who have participated in the previous enactments (both last year and this) will know that the principal focus has been on the active participants in the liturgy. Even at Salisbury in May, those in the congregation were treated as though they were members of the medieval cathedral community – sitting in the canons' and vicars' stalls, and following the texts and actions of the liturgy.

St Fagans will be different, because at both Latin services each day there will be those who are active participants in the formal liturgy within the chancel, bounded by the screens; and there will be those who form a 'passive' congregation in the nave. (On some days there will additionally be opportunity for members of the public to attend.)

For those in the chancel (whether the 'Mass team' or the 'Vespers team') there will be white-hot concentration to get everything as right as possible. For those in the nave, there will be the same opportunity for individual engagement, disengagement or distraction as in the Middle Ages, even if the modes of thought and action that result may be different.

There are three challenges for those in the nave: (a) to be familiar with the structure and sequence of the liturgy in the chancel, and (b) to begin to engage with some of the medieval patterns of devotion commended to the laity. Both of these challenges rely on literacy for prompts and guidance; and that leads to the third stage, (c) to begin to explore non-literate engagement with the worship. We shall endeavour to work through those challenges during the week.

Most of you have been given a distinct persona. within a broad social grouping (high, middle, low status; well-educated, literate, illiterate). That will define some of the emphasis of your engagement – helped physically by appropriate costume, we hope. There are also common issues we all have to engage with.

1. **Mortality.** Given a sample of 24 participants, it is likely that around 12 of us would not have survived to our respective ages in the late Middle Ages (or even beyond the womb). Death was far more likely and far more immediately experienced.

2. **Being spiritually prepared for death.** With an expectation that you are as likely to die as live, being ready for death is a constant pre-occupation. With a belief that you face a testing period being purged of your sins in purgatory means that you want to mitigate that trial as much as possible by good deeds, prayer and religious observance. Furthermore, you need to be in good standing with the Church in order to be in good standing with your Judge: even after purgatory your sins may be such that you are to be eternally damned in hell.

3. **The powerful reality of the presence of Christ.** Set against mortality and the fear of the consequences of death, you have a strong sense of the presence of Christ, and in the Mass you live out his Passion. Indeed just think of making the Sign of the Cross – touching the forehead where the crown of thorns thrust into the flesh, reaching down towards the nails through the feet, and then from one shoulder to the other towards the nails through each of the hands.

It is Christ's pain, suffering and death that offers you hope of salvation. It is Christ's resurrection – implicit in the living body and blood of the consecrated bread and wine at the

Mass – that strengthens your hope of resurrection. So it is the sight of that tortured body at the elevation in the silence of the Canon of the Mass that is your first focus towards which the whole ritual has been moving; and it is in the priest's breaking of the body and mingling with the blood before he receives those elements that is the second focus after the Lord's Prayer.

Only the priest receives the sacrament. But, you share in the giving of the peace. The priest kisses the chalice in which Christ's blood rests. He then kisses the Pax, transferring that saving life-force from chalice to Pax; then it is brought to you to kiss. Through that transferred kiss you are in touch with your Creator and Redeemer. And the ritual of peace is three-fold (just like the Agnus Dei): peace with God, peace with yourself, and peace with your neighbour.

**4. The reality of the living saints.** The Church believes in the communion of the saints living and departed: all are equally alive – if unseen. Above all, the reality of the presence of Christ, the Son of God, makes the presence of his human mother, Mary, all the more immediate. She who was God's conduit in the birth of Jesus, can be the conduit for your contact with the living God. She can plead your cause at the throne of God in heaven. There is a strong physical presence even of the unseen saints: their images and statues confirm their reality just like photographs and video today. In the medieval Mass you suffer alongside Mary at the foot of the Cross; you rejoice with her in Christ's birth, resurrection and ascension.

In the light of these very basic points I want to ask you to undertake two pieces of reading of early texts before you come to St Fagans.

Late medieval writers concerned for the purposeful prayer and conduct of the laity addressed some of the issues that will face us as a 'modern medieval' congregation. These writings offer some help to us today. Of course we have to acknowledge that for all of us the practices of medieval liturgy are unfamiliar, let alone the wider inculturation into medieval society and religion. (That does not invalidate our project: it does, however, establish some of the parameters within which it operates.) These writings offer a way in to the medieval Mass for the laity, and at least part a small window into the medieval way of thinking about and experiencing the Mass as a lay person.

**A. From a *Book Concerning Ceremonies used in the Church of England* (c. 1539)**

This is a rationally presented defence of the Mass, its nature and its conduct, written about 1539, at a time when the Church in England was already being pressed by some to more radical reform. This gives a good outline of the order of the Mass, as well as some of the intentions, implications and emblematic understanding of the Mass.

**B. From *Merita Missae* (fifteenth century)**

This is intended to serve as a directive and teaching text for those whose verbal knowledge of the church's worship is limited to three basic texts: Lord's Prayer, Ave Maria, and Apostles' Creed. It is written in rhyming couplets.

We are not sending you a text and/or translation of the Mass (unless you are clergy or singer in the Mass) – and those in the nave will not be offered one (unless you are one of the nuns on pilgrimage). It is important that the text remains inaccessible, part of the mystery. The same will apply to Vespers when the women sing as nuns. From the beginning of the week we will, however, offer additional materials to use in the worship and also in reflection.

*jmh: 9:vi:11*