

## **Beliefs:** How is the Bible used in liturgy?

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The Bible is at the heart of the liturgy of the Church, but before we can unpack this we should first form a definition of liturgy to help us.

The word liturgy originates in the ancient Greek language and means, literally, the work or offering of the people – it is a task, an exercise, a charge, or a service undertaken by an individual for the people, or on behalf of the state. The word is used in the Greek translations of the Bible in reference to the performance of religious duties and thence the word begins to indicate more solemn and ceremonial themes. If, then, the liturgy of the Church is a work undertaken by the people, it could be seen as a response to something; something which is revealed in the Scriptures.

The Bible is a collection of literature of various genres through which God chooses to reveal His nature and work in the world: it records, gives voice, and offers a vocabulary for what it means to be in relationship with the Divine.

Matthew 7:24 says: 'Everyone then who hears these words of mine and acts on them will be like a wise man.' The Bible isn't just something to be read, but put into action. The liturgy of the Church then could be understood as acting out what we know of God in the Scriptures and the teaching we discover in the Word – we do this in several ways.

Firstly, and it is perhaps obvious to state, the Bible is read, aloud, as part of the liturgy – the instruction, the history, the story is proclaimed for all to hear and receive. Jesus said 'Go into all the world and proclaim the good news to the whole creation.' Mark 16:15.

Secondly, the very words of the responses and prayers we use in the liturgy are taken from the Bible, or are at least inspired by Bible texts i.e. the first line of the service of Morning Prayer 'O Lord, open our lips and our mouth shall proclaim your praise' is taken from Psalm 51:15. This is a different way of engaging with the text – it's not just something to listen to. The Word is the framework of our worship, it sets the parameters; like a worshipping vocabulary. We know that we are worshipping authentically if we keep to the traditions set before us for 'All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, so that the servant of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work' 2 Timothy 3:16-17.

Used in this way, the Bible is a symbol of God's work in the world. Through the words of the Scriptures, He reveals something of Himself to those that read, hear and reflect upon the sacred texts. The Bible itself, therefore, is treated with respect and reverence – it is a means of communication with God and acknowledging God's presence with us. It is for this reason, that in the main liturgy – the Eucharist (i.e. Holy Communion, the sharing of bread and wine) – the Bible is processed, held up high, honoured with incense and even revered with a kiss as a principle symbol of God's presence.