

## Rivendell Postulant's Guide, Unit A

### The Sanctification of Time The Daily Office and the Rhythms of Sacred Time

From *The Companions' Rule of the Rivendell Community*:

“We intend to immerse ourselves in the rhythms of sacred time, including observance of the various seasons, feasts and fasts appointed.

“We will observe the days of special devotion by some special act(s) of discipline and self-denial.”

#### **The sanctification of time**

We human beings live immersed in time. It's hard to imagine any alternative to this—as hard, we might imagine, as it would be for a fish to imagine not living in water. Unlike the fish, however, we cannot move freely through time, as we can move through the three dimensions of space. “Time, like an ever-rolling stream, bears all our years away.” (Isaac Watts; Hymn 680)

Time often seems like an enemy, or a problem, at least. Time moves along inexorably, bearing each of us toward the end: not the end of time itself, of course, but the end of our immersion in the time of this mortal world. Yet, despite our common-sense assumption that time ticks away steadily, minute after minute, day after day, century after century, in the imaginative world of a post-Einsteinian universe time expands and contracts, depending on where you are, how fast you're going, and what you're relating to. And, for all the counter-intuitivity of the theory of relativity, it does correspond with our subjective experience of time: That there is not enough of it is a chronic complaint: most of us have wished for an eighth day of the week, or a twenty-fifth hour of the day! Yet in certain circumstances—a hospital waiting room, or the check-out line at the supermarket, for instance—time seems to expand and “drag.”

Yet one of the gracious possibilities offered by Christian life is a change in our relationship with and experience of time: we can live and dance in the “rhythms of sacred time,” rather than simply plod along in the death march of workweeks and calendars. Living within the rhythms of sacred time is one of the most potent means of “conversion of life”—especially for us in the liturgical Christian tradition.

In this unit we'll consider two aspects of our Rule which invite us to live more deeply and mindfully with God through the sanctification of time: the liturgical year and the Daily Office. But first, what do we actually mean by “sacred time”?

The Biblical view of the world distinguishes two kinds of “time,” signified by two different Greek words, both of which are usually translated into English as “time”:

*Chronos* is clock time, calendar time, the kind of time that ticks steadily away, and is measurable in units like seconds, months, and millennia. (Yet, in a post-Einsteinian universe, even *chronos* is not constant and linear!)

*Kairos* is significant time, as in “the time of your life,” or “the time was ripe.” We might think of *kairos* as the intersection of *chronos* and eternity.

The liturgical calendar is a powerful means of “sanctifying” time, wedding *chronos* to *kairos*. So, “sacred time” is “sacramental”: *chronos* (the hours of the day, the calendar of the week and the year), becomes an “outward sign” of *kairos*, eternal, gracious reality.

Potentially, at least, the liturgical calendar can draw us into a spiritual universe brimful of meaning, in which even the most ordinary and homely aspects of routine life become lifted up into blessedness, uniting our little daily stories with the Great Story. Living deeply in the rhythms of sacred time can open us up to the “sacrament of the present moment.”

“If ordinary chronological time is like an arrow, moving inexorably from beginning to end, or like a circle, endlessly returning us to the same place to relive our mistakes over and over again, then time shaped by and infused with meaning by the liturgy is like a spiral. It is carrying us progressively toward the completion of God’s plan and towards our own fulfillment.” (Susan White, *The Spirit of Worship: The Liturgical Tradition*)

“To be deeply Christian is to know and to live out the conviction that the whole human family dwells continuously at the intersection of time and eternity.” (Lawrence Stookey)

“Time is no longer experienced as merely duration as the hours pass and the years slide by... To sanctify time is to heighten our awareness of the eternal significance of each moment lived in time.” (Philip Pfatteicher)

In the sacramental/liturgical expression of Christian life, we discover that there is something “real” about liturgical time; the Christian calendar is not just a particularly successful program of Christian education, or a systematic, thorough method for “covering” the Biblical story and the teachings of the Church (although it *does* these.)

This sense is expressed in certain Collects of Principal Feasts, which speak of the mysteries being celebrated as present realities:

Christmas Day: “...You have given your only-begotten Son to take our nature upon him, and to be born [**this day**] of a pure virgin...” [Traditional: “as at this time to be born...”]

Easter Day: “O God, who made **this most holy night** to shine with the glory of the Lord’s resurrection...”

Pentecost: “**On this day** you opened the way of eternal life to every race and nation...”  
“O God, who **on this day** taught the hearts of your faithful people...”

“The Christian year is a mystery through which every moment and all the times and seasons of this life are transcended and fulfilled in that reality which is beyond time. Each single holy day, each single gospel pericope in the sequence of the year, is of itself a sacrament of the whole gospel. Each single feast renews the fullness and fulfillment of the Feast of feasts, our death and resurrection with Christ.” (Massey Shepherd)

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So, what about “*immersing ourselves*” in sacred time? We might think of the liturgical calendar – the kind you hang up on your wall, or look at toward the beginning of the *Book of Common Prayer*, as like a map. We introduce church school children and adult inquirers to the contours of the year, the names and emphases of the seasons, the liturgical colors, and so forth, perhaps representing the year diagrammatically as a circle; this is basic information for participating in the life of the Episcopal Church. But looking at the diagram is to living out the year as studying a map is to walking through the territory it depicts: it’s very helpful to get a sense of the lay of the land and the principal features, but it’s quite a different experience to *be* there.

As we “immerse ourselves” in sacred time, we seek to live deeply within these holy mysteries of our faith, to let them become our own rhythms, as much a part of our lives as getting up in the morning, or even as our own breath and heartbeat, and, gradually, to let them transform us and draw us into their eternal meaning and beauty. Moreover, we discover that the realities of sacred time themselves are a kind of sacramental “outside” of the mostly-invisible reality of our union with Christ, our participation in him and with him in the life of the Blessed Trinity. The self-emptying love of the Incarnation, and the Paschal Mystery, become the shape of our own lives. This is part of what we mean by “Christian spiritual formation”: the way in which Christ is formed in us, and we in him. So, then, living the liturgical year is a very potent and profound means of spiritual formation for us.

In the next section we’ll return to this topic and discuss how we actually live the rhythms of sacred time in practice. Meanwhile, here are a few questions which you might like to think about. For purposes of discussion, please write a paragraph or two about at least one of them—and about any other thoughts and experiences you may have on this topic.

– What has been your own experience of liturgical time? If you grew up in a liturgical tradition, how did you experience the seasons and feasts as a child? If you came to this tradition as an adult, how did you first experience it?

– What is your favorite season or feast? (This one I find unanswerable, because it’s generally whatever one we’re in right now that I’m convinced is my very favorite!) Is there one which seems most like “home” to you? One which somehow resonates with or represents your

particular experience of the Christian life, and/or your sense of vocation?

– If you have been in the Episcopal Church, or some other liturgical tradition, for quite a while, how have you found that liturgically-shaped living contributes to your general mindfulness or recollection?