

WISCONSIN FEDERATION OF LUTHERAN ALTAR GUILDS

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NEWSLETTER – SPRING 2017

MESSAGE FROM REVEREND RICKY P. SCHROEDER, PASTORAL ADVISOR

PSALM 51

Soon we will begin the season of Lent. This Psalm is most appropriate for this season as Lent is a penitential season – that is a season to reflect on our sins, remember how Jesus paid for our sins and be renewed in our commitment and service of our Lord.

This is one of two Psalms that David wrote concerning his own experience of denial, repentance and renewal. The companion Psalm is Psalm 32. David had committed the sin of adultery and plotted the murder of Uriah, her husband. (You can read of the events in II Samuel 11 & 12.)

This Psalm relates his experience of sin denied, sin confronted, sin confessed, sin absolved and the empowerment of forgiveness in service of the Lord.

Now take a moment to read through this Psalm.

Perhaps you will recognize verses 10-12. This hymn is preserved in the liturgy of the church as an offertory. It is sung in response to the hearing of God's forgiveness and the instruction of His Word (the Sermon). As we bring our offerings to the altar of God we recognize His gift of grace and offer ourselves as well as forgiven children. We wish to respond in good works (our life of sanctification) as did David.

It is my hope that as you have had opportunity to reflect on this Psalm and the related readings as indicated and find renewal. I personally find comfort that such a "saint" of the Old Testament Era could sin so boldly and be restored by the work of the Holy Spirit. Thanks be to God for His mercy endures forever!

To God be the glory!!

ARTICLE

At our last WFLAG meeting I was approached to write an article on the history of Altar linens. This article centers on the Altar only and not the linens used in the Sacraments which is a subject for another Newsletter.

ALTAR LINENS....

JUDAISM

Altar cloths date back to the time of the Exodus as stated in Exodus 31:10 (KJV)....."*and the cloths of service and the holy garments for Aaron the priest, and the garments of his sons, to minister in the priest's office*". The Jews traditionally used the colors of blue, purple and scarlet for the cloths of service that the priests used inside the tabernacle....*Exodus 39:1 (KJV)...."And of the blue, purple and scarlet, they made cloths of service, to do service in the holy place, and made the holy garments for Aaron; as the Lord commanded Moses"*. All cloths of

service were made from linen.

When the Temple in Jerusalem was destroyed in 70AD, the practice of altar cloths ceased. The need for an altar disappeared when the focus of worship turned towards the synagogue. The Torah is laid on a table (*bimah*) for reading and a lower table (*amud*) is a lectern covered with an embroidered cloth on which the Torah scroll rest during the (*parashah*) Torah reading. The Ark in the synagogue is covered with a cloth (*parokhet*) to recall the veil which covered the entrance to the Holy of Holies.

ROMAN RITE

The use of altar-cloths goes back to the early centuries of the Church. In the fourth century (301-400AD) when every Christian knew that during the Celebration of the Mysteries, the altar was covered with a cloth. In the seventh century (601-700AD) Boniface III made it a law. In the ninth century (801-900AD) the custom of using three altar-cloths began for the licit celebration of Mass. The reason of this ruling of the Church is that if the Precious Blood should accidentally be spilt it might be absorbed by the altar-cloths before it reached the altar stone. It would be a grievous offence to celebrate without an altar cloth except in cases of grave necessity. To celebrate on two altar cloths or on one folded to cover the altar twice would probably constitute a venial sin.

Formally the altar cloths were made of gold and silver cloth inlaid with precious stones, silk and other material. At present they must be made of either linen or hemp. No other material may be used, even if it is equivalent or better than, linen or hemp for cleanliness, whiteness or firmness (1819). The two lower cloths must cover the whole surface of the table (*mensa*) of the altar, in length and width.

The top altar cloth must be single and extend regularly to the predella (a platform or step on which an altar is placed) on both sides. If the altar rest on columns or is made to fashion a sepulcher and is not ornamented with an antependium, it need only cover the table. The edges on the front and two sides may be ornamented with a border of linen or hempen lace which can have figures of the cross ostensorium (a metal vessel usually gold or silver plated with a transparent section in which the Sacred Host is placed in its lunette when exposed for adoration or carried in a procession), chalice or host and the like may appear. A piece of coloured material may be placed under the border to set forth these figures (1868). When candles are placed on the table of the Altar during the exposition of the Blessed Sacrament another clean white cloth should be placed over the altar-cloths to prevent stains. The corporal and the cere-cloth cannot take the place of the altar-cloths.

Besides the three altar-cloths there is another linen cloth, waxed on one waxed, which is called the chrismale (cere-cloth). It must be the exact size of the altar and be placed under the linen cloths to keep the altar-cloths dry. To procure cere-cloths, melt wax to boiling, add cloth until well saturated and hang to dry. When hardened, place between two unwaxed sheets of linen, iron thus securing three wax cloths. According to the rubrics, this cloth is remove once a year at the stripping of the Altar on Maundy Thursday and can be replaced with another cere-cloth.

The present rules of the Roman Rite are much less detailed, stating only;

“Out of reverence for the celebration of the memorial of the Lord and for the banquet in which the Body and Blood of the Lord are offered, there should be on an altar where this is celebrated, at least one cloth, white in colour, whose shape, size and decoration are in keeping with the altar’s structure.”

LUTHERAN

As Pastor Frank Senn, whose work centers on Christian liturgy, points out that Lutherans have come late to the use of paraments which are the “clothing” for the sanctuary furnishings. Previously the Lutheran practice was to cover the altar with a simple white linen, however practices have changed.

With the elimination of the cere-cloth, modern times have replaced it with a heavy linen cloth that may have a frontal attached to it. A fair linen is placed over the top of the heavy linen.

Definitions:

Frontal – a piece of fabric in the liturgical color of the season that covers all or part of the front of the altar. It may be hung from the altar, or, in the case of a large freestanding altar, it may be a rectangular cloth that is carefully draped to the floor (called Laudian or Jacobean because of its Anglican origin). Symbols placed on the frontal are usually associated with the season of the Church Year or with the Lord’s Supper.

Fair Linen - matches the altar dimensions exactly or is a little longer than the mensa, extending down the two sides. Five crosses, reminiscent of Jesus’ five wounds, are embroidered on the fair linen, which symbolizes the burial cloth of Jesus.

In researching this article, I have found many more religions that have varying practices of altar cloths. The continuing thought is the respect and reverence given to symbolize the beliefs of each individual religion.

Sources for this article:

Altar cloth – Wikipedia, the free encyclopedia

Altar Cloths – Catholic Encyclopedia

Gathered Guests – A Guide to Worship in the Lutheran Church – Timothy H. Maschke

WFLAG MEMBERSHIP LIST – 2016

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**THANK YOU!.....ST. JOHN LUTHERAN CHURCH
WAUSAU, WISCONSIN**

*For hosting our Annual Meeting
on Saturday, May 7th, 2016*

*Everyone enjoyed the joining together
for worship, fellowship, information,
and your warm hospitality.*

“the Board”

PRAYER.....

God, accept and bless the work of our hands,
as we serve you in the care and adornment
of your sanctuary.

That your holy name may be glorified,
through Jesus Christ, your Son, our Lord.

Amen