

Understanding Episcopal Liturgy

#13. What is the reason the Gospel is read from the center of the Nave?

As is often the case, there is a historical answer to this question, and a simple, more spiritual answer. The simple answer is that the story of Jesus and the teachings of Jesus are most important for us. The Gospel Book is processed into the center of the nave and read in the midst of the congregation as a symbol of the central role the Gospels play in our lives. We receive the Gospel Book into the center of the congregation in the manner of receiving a great gift. This is the foundation for everything else, and we receive it wholeheartedly.

Many centuries ago, the pulpit was located near the center of the nave. Since there were no electrical amplification systems at the time, it was much more practical for the sermon to be preached from the center of the nave. By the 4th century it had become near universal practice for the Gospel to be read by the deacon (or in the absence of a deacon, by a priest). Then the preacher would preach the sermon from the same location, the pulpit in the center of the nave. Immediately before the reading of the Gospel, the Gospel Book was carried from the altar to the pulpit. This procession included acolytes carrying torches or lanterns that brought more light for reading the Gospel. During high holy days our Gospel processions recall this ancient tradition by including torch bearers.

If you have a question about something in our liturgy, I will be happy to answer it. Please ask in person, or send an email to me at revmajor@stpaulsyr.org.

Fr. Philip +