

## *Understanding Episcopal Liturgy*

### *#37. Why is the hymn before the Gospel called 'The Gradual Hymn'?*

The meaning comes from the Latin word *gradus*, which means 'step'. In the ancient church there were no electrically powered amplification systems, so the places for reading the lessons, and preaching the sermon, were elevated platforms. Standing on top of the elevated platform, the reader's voice had a better chance of being heard through the entire nave. (By the way, our ancestors referred to each of these elevated platforms as a 'pulpit', the name we use for the highest of these elevated preaching places in our nave.)

There were steps leading up to these elevated platforms. When the time came for the Gospel reading, the deacon or priest would carry the Gospel book up the steps in a reverent, ceremonial way, while a psalm or hymn was sung. This music was called 'The Gradual' because it was sung either from the steps or while the reader was climbing the steps. So a 'Gradual Hymn' is a hymn associated with steps.

Thanks to modern amplification systems, we are able to proclaim the Gospel from the lowest point, in the center of the Nave. We still call it a 'Gradual Hymn', as the priest is taking many steps to bring the Gospel book into the center of the congregation.

*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](mailto:revmajor@stpaulsyr.org).*

*Fr. Philip +*