

The First Book of Common Prayer

Wednesday, June 7, 2006

Acts 2:38-42

Psalm 96:1-9 or

Psalm 33:1-5,20-21

John 4:21-24

In the name of God, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

This evening we observe a feast day for The First Book of Common Prayer. Actually, we can observe this day on any weekday following Pentecost. We don't observe it every year because other Feast Days fall on Wednesday, so it might not be really familiar to you.

I discovered that some years ago in a parish far, far away. I mentioned that we would be honoring The First Book of Common Prayer and had more turn out than was usual on a Wednesday. As the service went on, I noted some puzzled faces out there. It dawned on me that some people thought – and expected – that the first Book of Common Prayer was the 1928 book, and it didn't sound right. No doubt they also thought the last Book of Common Prayer was the 1928 book. But that's long ago, of course.

Actually, the first book came into use on Pentecost, June 9, 1549, in the second year of the reign of Edward the Sixth. It was the foundation for all the subsequent prayer books in the churches of the Anglican Communion. The language may differ, but the basic principle and pattern is the same.

The book was primarily the work of Thomas Cranmer, Archbishop of Canterbury from 1533 to 1556. His genius was to gather the material

from many traditions into one universal book for worship for the English people. He used books of Medieval Latin worship with enrichments from Greek liturgies; ancient Gallican rites as found in the French churches; the vernacular German forms prepared by Luther; a revised Latin liturgy then used in Cologne, Germany. Cranmer took the Psalms from The Great Bible authorized by Henry the Eighth in 1539, and the Great Litany issued in English in 1544.

Cranmer simplified it all. He made it possible for our common worship and our personal devotions to be found in one book, and that is the red book you hold in your hands this evening.

In His Holy Name.