

### A Meditation for Corpus Christi

*1 Cor: 11:23 For I have received of the Lord that which also I delivered unto you, That the Lord Jesus the same night in which he was betrayed took bread: 24 And when he had given thanks, he brake it, and said, Take, eat: this is my body, which is broken for you: this do in remembrance of me. 25 After the same manner also he took the cup, when he had supped, saying, This cup is the new testament in my blood: this do ye, as oft as ye drink it, in remembrance of me. 26 For as often as ye eat this bread, and drink this cup, ye do shew the Lord's death till he come. 27 Wherefore whosoever shall eat this bread, and drink this cup of the Lord, unworthily, shall be guilty of the body and blood of the Lord. 28 But let a man examine himself, and so let him eat of that bread, and drink of that cup. 29 For he that eateth and drinketh unworthily, eateth and drinketh damnation to himself, not discerning the Lord's body.*

*John 6:55 For my flesh is meat indeed, and my blood is drink indeed. 56 He that eateth my flesh, and drinketh my blood, dwelleth in me, and I in him. 57 As the living Father hath sent me, and I live by the Father: so he that eateth me, even he shall live by me. 58 This is that bread which came down from heaven: not as your fathers did eat manna, and are dead: he that eateth of this bread shall live for ever.*

The regular partaking of Holy Communion, the center of our worship, provides many great blessings which I want to focus upon today, the Sunday within the octave of the Feast of Corpus Christi. Although this feast doesn't appear in the Book of Common Prayer, it is honored in many Anglo-Catholic parishes, and appears on the Ordo Calendar as the first Thursday after Trinity Sunday.

In the early stages of my Christian life, I was puzzled by the necessity of such ceremonies as baptism and the Lord's Supper. After all, I reasoned, if our relationship with God is a spiritual one, why would there be a need for physical rites? The answer I was offered by those to whom I posed such questions was predictable: we do these things because Jesus commanded us to do them. That certainly seemed acceptable. We should do anything our Lord tells us to do. But somehow, the answer, as far as it went, was unsatisfying. God has given us the ability to reason, and to ask appropriate questions, and surely He desires to fulfill such longings with needful answers. Why, after all, would He tell us to do these specific things?

I became conscious at some point later in my spiritual development of a profound sense of missing something. It resembled that feeling one gets when one's body is consistently deprived of an element that it needs, such as a vitamin, or a nutrient. I finally concluded that the sense of emptiness was in part due to the absence of the regular celebration of the Lord's Supper, within the worship settings I attended. It was as if the standard components of preaching, singing, sharing, and praying, — as great as they were, and as important —, were yet incomplete. I concluded that if a church's view of Holy Communion fell short of granting it its biblical significance, its observance would be marginalized, and rendered optional. It would become easily something we could just as easily do with, or without. But my heart was telling me otherwise.

Since then, of course, I have been led by the Lord into a tradition where these physical actions are considered sacraments, which, by definition, are “outward and visible signs of an inward and spiritual divine grace”. The new perspective that I gained allowed me to look backward and perceive clearly what I had previously sensed was missing. To grant to Holy Communion the status of a sacrament meant that its place in our religion could hardly be optional. If the consecrated elements indeed became the body and blood of our Lord, they could occupy no less than the highest position in all the scope of Christian worship. Christ’s presence in the Eucharist causes our meetings with Him there to assume a character of exaltation and solemnity that could only be the consequence of intimate contact with something very great and holy. I concluded that the most basic worship service would be utterly complete if it had nothing more than His Body and Blood properly offered, whereas the grandest and most elaborate affair lacking this one simple ingredient would be deficient.

What significances can we draw from this most elementary and yet most necessary of meals? First, it is a reminder of our sins, and the means offered by God for their forgiveness. Just as Old Testament worshippers were obligated continually to return to the altar to offer animal sacrifice for remission of sins, so our return to the Christian altar reminds us faithfully of that one, final, everlasting atonement purchased by our Lord upon the Cross. This makes the Eucharist a place of great humility for the worshipper, for it is his own sins that have necessitated such a price. There, receiving the elements, he meditates not upon any sense of personal worth or merit, but upon the expensive grace that has been provided to meet his need. And this is no easy, intellectual encounter with a comfortable idea or philosophy. No, it is the very shed blood of the Lamb of God passing over the lips and into the mouth. It is the body of our Lord which is chewed and swallowed. In all of its crudeness, it brings the worshipper precisely around to where he needs to be, regularly and often.

Holy Communion also means that the momentum of worship depends not upon man, but God. I cannot rely upon my feelings when it comes to meeting with the Lord. I may feel religious one day, and not at all, the next. And if I base my spiritual life upon subjective experience, I will gauge the value of my time at church on whether or not the various parts of the service somehow managed to concoct for me a series of positive emotions that outweighed the negative.

But all of that is set aside, when by faith I partake of the Lord Himself in the most concrete form imaginable: eating His Body through the consecrated host, and drinking His blood through the wine. The action is utterly indifferent to whatever set of emotions were either in place or absent from the encounter. Wonderfully, that act of mere obedience opens for me the possibility of a whole realm of spiritual benefits. The Apostle wrote elsewhere: *The cup of blessing which we bless, is it not the communion of the blood of Christ? The bread which we break, is*

*it not the communion of the body of Christ?* (1 Cor. 10:16). The word “communion” is the familiar Greek *koinonia*, or “fellowship”. Fellowship with the body and blood of our Lord cannot help but bring us much good. They provide for the one, solid, objective basis of encountering our Lord in worship.

Lastly, just as partaking of the elements unites us with our Lord, so it serves to unite the worshippers: *For we being many are one bread, and one body: for we are all partakers of that one bread.* (*ibid.*, vs. 17). These words are exceedingly picturesque. To restate them: “Although we are a group of separate individuals, we are nevertheless brought together as if we were one unbroken loaf of bread. And the reason we are thus united is because we are partakers [“sharers”, “participants”] in the eucharistic body of Christ. What does that mean? It means that we are a part of one another on a level of spiritual intimacy that exceeds friendship, or membership, or fellowship. It is an organic bond, and perhaps it is something we know little about in this Western culture where such ideas tend to embarrass us, and where we are often more comfortable with others the more distant we are from them.

In a very real sense, once one has partaken of the Lord’s Supper it’s “too late” to go back, in the same way that having imbibed something toxic, there may be no hope of recovery. Perhaps this is why the apostle’s warnings in today’s Epistle are so grave: “Don’t do it, unless you’ve counted the cost!” Of all holy actions, what could require more of us? To eat His flesh and to drink His blood is to unite Him with ourselves, just as we are. We are inviting the Savior into the very center of our lives, not somewhere on the outskirts, and by eating and drinking Him we make the matter as real as it can get. And in doing so we are pledging our mystical union with each other, as well.

Until we see Him upon His return, this will remain our duty: *For as often as ye eat this bread, and drink this cup, ye do shew the Lord's death till he come .*

*In the Name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost. Amen.*