

The Place of Holy Communion

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.

I am in hopes of offering a series of sermons during the early part of Trinity Season on the subject of the Church.

It is clear to me that misconceptions surround the topic of the Church largely because it has existed for so long in a fractured state, and we have tended to allow the church to be completely redefined by its current state and practice, instead of returning to its scriptural template, and the example of tested tradition. As life for exiled Israel was filled with wistful longing for the land from which they had been expelled, so the Church remembers earlier eras when its influence, its strength, and even its unity have been more manifest. But memories fade with time, and in their place come regrets and that emptiness born of hopes long delayed.

The consequence is that our expectations of the Church are very low. We assume that what is, is all that can be. And we resign ourselves to the status quo which we must honestly admit sets the lowest possible bar for what we feel compelled to call acceptable.

What we all long for, with all of our hearts, is the greatest possible expression upon earth of the "one Holy, Catholic and Apostolic Church" as our great creeds call it. We seek this very end because it was prayed for earnestly by our Lord Himself on the night of His betrayal and the eve of His atoning death, and because it is found described in great detail throughout the rest of the New Testament. Its structure, its form, its mission, its organization, are clearly spelled out.

Even if we could do nothing else in our day than to pray for the fulfillment of this prayer and to work toward it with all of our strength and energy, we would have at least attempted to offer our part in answering it. We know not the hour of its realization, but we believe in it wholeheartedly, and every inch of progress we make towards its realization is a rejection of the inertia that is the province of those who have traded faith for the false security of simply believing that things are always better left just the way they are.

Today is the Sunday in the octave of the Feast of Corpus Christi, called also “The Commemoration of the Most Holy Body and Blood of our Lord Jesus Christ”. This seems an excellent place to start our discussion of the Church, because it makes us face directly, as the family of Christ, this most important Meal of our lives.

Meals. Times of fellowship, friendship, and loving exchange, when all are brought together in one place, and, hopefully, are free of strife and discord. Everyone wants to successfully digest their food in peace, because it is impossible to do so, otherwise. But this has hardly been the case in Christ’s divided Body, for it is precisely at the celebration of this Meal that the coldness and inhospitality of disunity have been manifest. Two of the three great branches of Catholic Christianity — the three being Roman Catholicism, Eastern Orthodoxy, and Anglicanism — have erected what appear to be insuperable barriers to intercommunion. As we will see, this state of affairs greatly disrupts the order of the Church.

As our study expands, we will realize how marvelous are the structures of the Church that Christ Himself inaugurated. For we are indeed...:

Eph. 2:19 ...no more strangers and foreigners, but fellowcitizens with the saints, and of the household of God; 20 And are built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ himself being the chief corner stone; 21 In whom all the building fitly framed together groweth unto an holy temple in the Lord: 22 In whom ye also are builded together for an habitation of God through the Spirit.

There is indeed a hierarchy, but when its members are submitting themselves to God, along with all others who constitute this living organism called the Church, it is an orderly arrangement that is filled with grace. Grace for the Church! This is no small matter. Grace is God’s empowerment to fulfill His mission upon earth. Grace from God causes us to rejoice in the Him, to give Him glory and praise, for it is the visible sign of His investment of Himself among us.

Let me attempt to make a few careful and hopefully judicious statements about “the whole state of Christ’s Church” today, which we pray for every Sunday. We’ve already glanced briefly at the situation among the Catholic churches. But Protestantism, perceiving real abuses of authority in the hierarchical church, has set itself free from what appears to be the grave clothes of institutionalism. It is very, very telling, however, that this perceived liberty has not come without great cost, even if the cost is neither perceived nor acknowledged among them.

How can our Protestant brethren — our Baptist, Pentecostal, Methodist, non-denominational friends — sit down with us at the Love Feast of the Lord’s Supper, which is the theme of the Feast of Corpus Christi? Without the consecration of the elements by those duly ordained to do so, Holy Communion is pushed off into the shadows of disuse, relegated to that list of options we allow ourselves to freely accept or deny. Oneness in Christ becomes purely spiritual. The locus, the center of our fellowship, which is this Altar before us, where Christ is present both spiritually *and* materially, is denied them, and this by no other agency other than their own choice.

“Does it matter?” would be the rejoinder. But in an age like this, when souls are attempting to survive off of the dismal malnourishment of cyberspace, when brains are cultivated at the expense of hearts, and the Christian faith is being so roundly rejected as something superfluous and unnecessary, how can the people of God reject that which God has so clearly provided for the spiritual health and welfare of their spirits, souls, and bodies?

Yes, it is certainly true that the Holy Ghost unites us in Christ:

1 Cor. 12:12 For as the body is one, and hath many members, and all the members of that one body, being many, are one body: so also is Christ. 13 For by one Spirit are we all baptized into one body, whether we be Jews or Gentiles, whether we be bond or free; and have been all made to drink into one Spirit.

But as long as we live in physical bodies, as long as we are *here*, yes, even waiting *till He comes* (1 Cor. 11:26), we will also have need of that which our Lord called *meat indeed and drink indeed*, the Body and Blood of our Lord Jesus Christ.

So let us return to this Holy Meal every Sunday, resolved to derive the greatest benefit from it which we possibly can. In celebrating our unity with Christ through partaking of the elements, we will find ourselves supernaturally united with one another, for as the Apostle said:

1 Cor. 10:16 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? 17 For we being many are one bread, and one body: for we are all partakers of that one bread.

Our regular return to this Table is our guarantee that there will always be a center-point from which all else radiates. Full, satisfied, well-nourished, we will arise from this Holy Meal ready to love one another, and then to turn to the daunting task of loving the denizens of this loveless age.

But our satisfaction will always be conditional, until our Lord’s prayer *that they may be one* is fulfilled. Then there will be no more barriers within the Church to full fellowship. Then we will all indeed be seated at the same long, long table, where saints of every color, race, nation, and age dine together in joy and gladness.

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