

01 April 2021—Maundy Thursday: I Corinthians 11:23-26

*For as often as you eat this bread and drink the cup, you proclaim the Lord's death until he comes.*

We are so familiar with Paul's words, indeed with all 'churchy' words that we can hear them and not know what is being stated. Here we are, gathered in a middling sized Episcopal parish, in a middling sized city, in the middling expanse of Southwest Georgia field and forest. Traffic zips by outside, people intent on getting home or somewhere, perhaps a few noticing cars in the parking lot and Church lights on. A few may think in passing, "Those 'Piscopals' must be having a service, or a wine-tasting." Most will not give us a thought. Yet here we are *proclaiming the Lord's death until he comes*.

What we do here tonight is certainly commemorating the gift of the Holy Eucharist, given by Christ to His Church and to the world. This evening we call to mind the Last Supper of Jesus with his followers. We do so much more, however. With the Holy Eucharist, we experience Jesus' continuing presence in the Church, and we are united to God in Christ, to one another and all the faithful, living, dead, and yet to be. The union in Christ among all believers, is not mere togetherness, but a one-ness received as a gift from God, through the power of the Holy Spirit.

In the Eucharist, common bread and wine become the Body and Blood of Christ. In the Episcopal Church we do not attempt to explain *how* Christ is present. We refer to Christ's Real Presence in the Sacrament as a 'mystery'. In the ancient world a mystery was not a puzzle to be solved. A mystery is a reality beyond intellect and words, which we can only know by entering the reality to which the 'mystery' points. The Eucharist is not an event to be objectively explained but a divine encounter with God into which we are invited to enter and be transformed.

In the Eucharist Jesus comes to us, not from 'on high' but in a humble meal, not to overpower but to nurture from within. The maker of all things visible and invisible, yearns to be cradled in the palm of your hand, longs to be in your mortal body. The desire of God's heart is to become one with you, not just spiritually but also in your humanity. To receive what God longs to give, we get up from where we sit: this is symbolic of our desire for transformation. We leave behind where we have been; we come and hold out our hands to receive what we cannot give ourselves. We come, not to escape our humanity but in part to give our humanity to Him, including our unreliable, everchanging emotions, our doubts and fears, our sins and failings, so Jesus will transform our flesh and blood into the glory of God through his flesh and blood.

We hear Jesus: *This is my Body...this is my Blood*; we entreat the Holy Spirit to transform simple elements into the Heavenly Banquet and help us receive worthily, so we become proclaimers of Christ in all our relationships and environments.

Through the Sacrament of the Altar, we become Sacraments to the world. We become Christ's ears, eyes, hands, feet, and heart in the world. We become outward, visible signs of God's eternal, gentle grace which our loving-kind Redeemer longs to give everyone through eternity.

Blessed, praised, hallowed, worshiped, and adored be our Lord Jesus Christ, on his throne of glory in heaven, in the most Holy Sacrament of the Altar, and in the hearts of his faithful people. Amen.