

St. Andrew’s Anglican Church, Douglas, GA

The Rev. Fr. John E. Commins+ Rector

Scripture: John 6: 53-59

“Giving Thanks”

Today’s Holy Gospel is a very important one, which has drawn quite a bit of controversy because of several different opinions throughout the Christian Church. Believers remain faithful followers of our Lord Jesus Christ – but they differ about what we call Holy Communion and some call the ‘Lord’s Supper.’ I want you to understand that what I am about to do this morning is to look at what our brothers and sisters in other churches do in Holy Communion – and that is not to pick it apart or to denigrate it – but for us to examine and understand it.

Jesus stated in today’s Holy Gospel reading: *“I tell you the truth, unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink his blood, you have no life in you. Whoever eats my flesh and drinks my blood has eternal life, and I will raise him up at the last day. For my flesh is real food and my blood is real drink. Whoever eats my flesh and drinks my blood remains in me, and I in him. Just as the living Father sent me and I live because of the Father, so the one who feeds on me will live because of me. This is the bread that came down from heaven. Your forefathers ate manna and died, but he who feeds on this bread will live forever.”* (John 6:53-58) Jesus was expressing what His mission was for the entire world, wanting people to know that the real purpose of His coming into the world was to save their souls. The word ‘Savior’ means ‘rescuer.’ They wanted a king who could feed them every day just like Moses had fed them in the desert with the daily manna – not a Savior.

During His time on earth – Jesus gave so much of Himself – especially giving His life on the cross, but He also gave us the Sacrament we call Holy Eucharist. The Greek word *“eucharistésas”* (εὐχαριστήσας) is used in 1 Corinthians 11:24 as well as in Luke 22:19 from the root εὐχαριστέω *“eucharistéo”*. These words mean to give thanks. As Anglicans we have called the second part of our service, after the Peace and the Creed, “the Great Thanksgiving.” At the altar I will pray these words, *“For on the night that He was betrayed, our Lord Jesus Christ took bread; and when he had given thanks...”* and that is *“eucharistéo.”*

Today, Christians gather to celebrate this wonderful gift – but it also reflects one of the largest differences in parts of the Church - how the gift of Holy Communion is perceived. Is the presence of Christ – the Real Presence of Christ - found in the bread and wine during the celebration? The term the “Real Presence” is used to describe Jesus in the bread and wine taught by Lutherans, Anglicans, Methodists, Orthodox, Aramaic, and Roman Catholics, with some unique and significant differences. Some of the differences with how the “Real Presence” is seen includes – “Transubstantiation,” “Consubstantiation or Sacramental Union”, “Holy Mystery” and “a Memorial.” Please do not judge those who follow these beliefs. Please keep in mind that it is Christ who they are worshipping. Let’s try to understand why.

Twelfth Sunday After Pentecost, August 15, 2021, Liturgical Year “B”

Transubstantiation is a term that Roman Catholics use meaning ‘essential change,’ the belief that by the power of God at the consecration during the Mass, the bread and wine physically change into the actual body and blood of Jesus, even though they look like bread and wine. Roman Catholics often worship or venerate the Bread at services called “Benediction” with a very large wafer or host in a large “sun-like” gold vessel that is called a “monstrance,” and people are directed to bow to, pray to, and worship the elements of the Eucharist. You can check our sacristy and you will not find a monstrance. We don’t do that! As Anglicans – we are directed to Article XXVIII (28) of the Thirty-Nine Articles found on page 783 in our Prayer Book – which says, “*Transubstantiation (or the change of the substance of Bread and Wine) in the Supper of the Lord, cannot be proved by Holy Writ; but is repugnant to the plain words of Scripture.. and hath given occasion to many superstitions. The Body of Christ is given, taken, and eaten, in the Supper, only after a heavenly and spiritual manner... The Sacrament of the Lord’s Supper was not by Christ’s ordinance reserved, carried about, lifted up, or worshipped.*” Because of this - this was all to stop, however, in some “high” Anglo-Catholic churches worshipping the host errantly continues even today. This doctrine or belief of transubstantiation did not come into being until eight hundred years after Jesus died and it would still be another four centuries before this doctrine was officially accepted by the Roman Catholic Church, during medieval times. It is a major division between Catholics and Protestants. Again, do not point fingers. I want you to understand what they do and why they do it.

The Orthodox and Aramaic churches embrace the “Real Presence of Christ” in the Eucharist and they do not accept “Transubstantiation.” Martin Luther taught that the body and blood of the Lord is present “*in, with and under*” the bread and wine. So, Lutherans believe that they consume the holy body and blood of Christ Himself along WITH the bread and the wine. This is called “consubstantiation” and also “Sacramental Union.”

Methodists, who’s founder John Wesley, along with his brother Charles, were Anglican priests until the day they died, affirmed that the sacrament of Holy Communion is an instrumental means of grace in which Jesus is truly present and that the means of that presence is a “Holy Mystery.” The minister prays for the Holy Spirit to make the bread and wine or for many Methodists - grape juice, to “be for us the body and blood of Christ.” Methodists also outwardly reject “Transubstantiation.”

I want to go back to article 28 of the 39 Articles, and there is a word in there that sticks in my craw – the word is repugnant. I went to Miriam Webster to find out just what repugnant means. I want you to grab on to whatever meaning you want. It means incompatible, or inconsistent, offensive, distasteful, objectionable, abominable, detestable. That is what Miriam Webster says, not me. Article 28 says repugnant, and if you want to, if you have a copy of the prayer book, I suggest you go and look at page 783, Article 28.

In many Anglican and Roman Catholic churches - you might see a priest bring the thumb and forefinger together, forming a circle on each hand. You will notice that I do this regularly at the

altar during the consecration. It is because fingers which have touched the consecrated bread do not touch anything else, to purposely keep them holy and separate after being washed by the Acolyte in the lavabo bowl. Lavabo in Latin means “to wash.” It is so that those fingers are to touch the consecrated bread and I will not separate them until the bread is broken into 4 pieces, and I say “Alleluia, Christ our Passover is sacrificed for us.” Traditions of how Christians worship and do things should not be confused with “why” we worship, and even more importantly – who we worship.

Many reformed churches like Presbyterians, Calvinists, and most ‘United Churches’ view the Holy Communion as bread and wine (or grape juice) and that the presence of Christ does not spiritually or physically enter into those elements. According to the teachings of John Calvin *“the Holy Spirit unites things separated in space.”*

By the way, the Roman Catholic Church will not allow anyone except Roman Catholics to receive the sacrament of Holy Communion at their masses, while we Anglicans believe, like many other denominations, that **all baptized Christians are welcome to come up and receive from the Lord’s Table**. It is not the table of Saint Andrew’s but it is the table of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. You all are welcome to come and receive the bread and wine from His altar. Please honor all of these Christian traditions and beliefs.

There are other’s in the Body of Christ who view that the Holy Communion using the words of institution of Jesus, over merely symbolic elements, but nothing miraculous or significant happens – and they do just as the Lord commanded this is to be done - in remembrance of Him. This is common among Baptists and many other Evangelical, Pentecostal, or some Reformed churches. That is how they worship. Have you ever gone to a service in a church and you are given a little plastic cup of grape juice and you peel the top off it and there is a host inside, and then you peel the other part and there is the grape juice? That would be that kind of a service.

As Anglicans, we believe that something amazing happens during the blessing or consecration and “if you did a DNA test on the bread and wine – the results would say that it is physically bread and wine, however – after the consecration or words of institution – and there were such a thing as a “spiritual DNA test” – the results would cause us to humbly fall on our faces in worship – because spiritually they are the Body and Blood of Christ!” I cannot explain it - but the ‘real presence’ as we call it, I know that through the Holy Spirit, in blessing the bread and the wine we are being spiritually fed by Jesus Himself! That is why, if one of us drops a host on the carpet – we consume it right away. Those on the Altar Guild know that any blessed bread is either consumed or put in the Ambry, any wine or Holy Water is put into a special little sink in the sacristy called the piscina, with a drain that goes directly to the ground.

Most Anglicans believe in what is called the doctrine of the “Real Presence,” that Jesus’ presence is real, but is undefined. Anglicans have largely decided that Jesus’ words are unclear about the actual makeup of the bread and wine, but His words made it crystal clear that His

Twelfth Sunday After Pentecost, August 15, 2021, Liturgical Year “B”

followers are to eat this meal regularly, in honor of Him, in full expectation that He will be present, in peace and harmony with the rest of the body of Christ, and that doing so in some way as the Apostle Paul wrote – “*proclaims the Lord’s death until He comes again.*” (1 Corinthians 11:26). Last week I shared the words from Acts 2:42 about the early Church, “*they devoted themselves to the apostles’ teaching and to the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer.*”

The Communion meal eaten in remembrance of Jesus Christ, symbolizes both our union with Him and with each other and His death on our behalf. And so, this morning as you receive Jesus’ Body and Blood – remember as you partake - as the Lord did in the Upper Room – give thanks for the precious gift of the Real Presence of Jesus Christ. That is a gift that we cannot explain but we will receive over and over again, in remembrance of our Lord and King.