

Thirteenth Sunday After Pentecost, August 19, 2018, Liturgical Year “B”

St. Andrew’s Anglican Church, Douglas, GA

The Rev. Fr. John E. Commins+ Rector

Scripture: John 6: 53-59

“Eucharisteo – The Real Presence”

God willing – this will be the last Sunday that I will preach from here. If you want to find out about what I am talking about – come next Sunday! I am just in awe, and I have been sharing on Facebook about the changes. Holly gave me a picture of the first service that took place in this church – when it became St. Andrew’s Anglican Church. It was nothing short of barren - but it had been even more barren before you did what you did! God had a plan, and God has been making that plan come true – as is evidenced by the runner the floors redone. I found out this week that there had been carpet on this floor, but it had to be ripped up since it was pretty nasty, and it was causing illness. What was left was the bare floor with the swirls of cement, but God had people make a wish list – and on that list was “please fix the floors,” followed by put in an altar rail. Then God put on Rowan’s heart to put in a new altar, and then a brand-new reredos, and then on Holly and Steve’s heart to build this beautiful back wall, and on the hearts of the Blampied’s and the Macy’s to have that cross on the wall. There is so much more; Steve is preparing some things that you will see hopefully next weekend so that we can use our brand-new pulpit, which matches the altar and the reredos. God is not done – there are magnificent things taking place here – because of your generosity, your heart and your vision. Amazing!

Today’s Holy Gospel is a very important one, but it has drawn quite a bit of controversy because of several different opinions throughout the Body of Christ. Now, while the diverse opinions of the meaning of the truth may be different, these believers remain faithful followers of our Lord Jesus Christ. What I am about to spell put for you – please do not take as criticism. This is the historical layout of what other Christians are doing on Sunday mornings.

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 basically telling everyone what His mission was for the world. Jesus wanted people to know that the real purpose of His coming into the world was to save their souls. When He told them that, they began to lose interest because as long as Jesus fed their bodies, they thought He was great and they wanted Him to be their king. What they wanted was a king who could feed them every day just like Moses had done in the desert with the daily manna.

The gift that Jesus gave to all of His followers was one thing - the gift of Himself.

- Jesus gave Himself on the cross – a perfect sacrifice, once for all.
- He gave His Holy Spirit to be present in the hearts and souls of all who believe in Him.

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- He gave Himself as the gift of bread and wine in the Upper Room on the night before He died, in remembrance.
- He gave us His words of institution, as recorded in Matthew 26:26-28, Mark 14:22-24, Luke 22:19-20, and in 1 Corinthians 11:23-26 – from which we remember and celebrate this gift – and from which we will partake from His Holy Table in the 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 or “*eucharistéo*”. That sounds familiar doesn’t it? Eucharist, which means “give thanks.” As Anglicans we have called the second part of our service, which is after the Peace and the Creed – “the Great Thanksgiving.” At the altar I will pray this “*For on the night that He was betrayed, our Lord Jesus Christ took bread; and when he had given thanks...*” “*eucharistéo*.”

As Christians gather to celebrate this wonderful gift – there comes one of the largest differences in parts of the Body of Christ. How is the gift of Holy Communion 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 and is taught by Lutherans, Anglicans, Methodists, Orthodox, Aramaic, and Roman Catholics (with some significant differences). But there are differences with how the “Real Presence” is seen and that includes – get ready for these heavy-duty words – “Transubstantiation,” (I’ll explain it) “Consubstantiation” (I’ll explain it) – or Sacramental Union, “Holy Mystery” and “a Memorial.” And again – please don’t judge. This is information so that we understand what are brothers and sisters are doing.

Ok then, what is Transubstantiation? It is a term in Roman Catholicism which means “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 substance of Jesus’ body and blood, even though they look like bread and wine. In the Roman Catholic church, the bread is often worshipped or venerated at services called “Benediction” in which a very large wafer or host is put into in a large “sun-like” gold vessel called a “monstrance,” and people were directed to be bowing to, praying to, and worshipping the elements of the Eucharist. According to Article XXVIII (28) of the Anglican Thirty-Nine Articles this was all to stop, however, in some “high” Anglo-Catholic churches worshipping the host continues even today. This doctrine or belief of transubstantiation – you need to know this – it did not happen on day one - it did not come into effect until eight hundred years after Jesus died and it would still be another four centuries before the doctrine was officially accepted by the Roman Catholic Church. We are talking medieval times. I think that this is important for us to know – and understand.

The Orthodox and Aramaic churches embrace the “Real Presence of Christ” in the Eucharist but they do not accept “Transubstantiation.” In the Lutheran tradition 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

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the bread and the wine. This is called “consubstantiation” and has also been called the
“Sacramental Union.”

Methodists, who’s founder John Wesley, along with his brother Charles, never stopped being Anglican priests, have 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 outwardly reject “Transubstantiation.”

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. 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 means “to wash.” It is so that the fingers are to touch the consecrated bread and I will not separate them until the bread is broken 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.

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 *spi* ritually or physically enter into those elements. According to the teachings of John Calvin “*the Holy Spirit unites things separated in space.*”

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 receive from the Lord’s Table. The reason I am going into great detail about how others view Holy Communion is so that we have an idea about their viewpoints and that we are called not to judge the others – but to honor their traditions and beliefs as well.

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 called “the Zwinglian view,” named after Swiss reformer, Huldrych Zwingli. 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 cup 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.

So, what do Anglicans believe about Holy Communion? Something interesting happened during our discernment committee, in preparation for me to enter into the ordination process way back in 2000 in Jacksonville. We had given permission to these people to ask us anything

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about our lives – no holds barred. One young man asked this question: “what happens at Holy Communion?” Marilyn came from the Presbyterian background and I came from a Roman Catholic background. They wanted to get what my viewpoint was and how it might have changed. My response was this – “if you did a DNA test on the bread and wine – you would get results that say 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 fall on our faces in worship – because spiritually they are the Body and Blood of Christ!” I cannot explain it - but I know that through the Holy Spirit, and I have experienced at the table, asking the Holy Spirit to work through me, in blessing the bread and the wine. We both believe with all our hearts that when we receive Holy Communion we are being spiritually fed by Jesus Himself!

Most Anglicans believe in what is called the doctrine of the “Real Presence,” that Jesus’ presence is real, but is undefined. In other words, 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 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).

Here are some things that all Anglican Christians believe about the Lord’s Supper:

- Jesus’ death on the cross was “*a full, perfect, and sufficient sacrifice, oblation and satisfaction for the sins of the whole world.*” You will hear those words during the words of consecration. We don’t add to it or repeat it. The sacrifice does not take place over and over again at the table. It already took place and cannot be re-done or re-sacrificed.
- The only sacrifice we make is the offering of “*ourselves, our souls and bodies,*” along with our thanksgiving to God.
- The physical bread and wine remain unchanged, but in being consecrated or set aside for a holy purpose, something significant happens spiritually! Just as we consume them physically with our mouths, we are nourished by Christ spiritually by faith. As I am about to give you Holy Communion, I hold up the bread and the wine and tell you they are “*The gifts of God for the people of God – take them in remembrance that Christ died for you. Feed on Him in your hearts by FAITH, with thanksgiving!*” Important words. Communion is a “common union.” As we take part in the Lord’s Supper we are assured of our membership in “the mystical body” of Christ, “which is the blessed company of all faithful people.”

You need to know this, and the Altar Guild knows this - any leftover blessed bread and wine should be cared for with great dignity, reverence and respect. They must never be simply thrown away. The leftover wine in the chalices is consumed at the table by the LEM’s – Lay

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Eucharistic Ministers or me and must never poured back into a container. The bread must be consumed as well, or we have a place where the “reserved sacrament” is stored called “the Ambry.” Even when cleaning the vessels that is to be done in a special sink in the sacristy called the “piscina” whose drain pipe goes directly to the ground. In the old days people would wash the vessels and pour the water directly to the ground. Again, treating it with reverence.

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. To be disrespectful of the elements, the symbols of His Body and Blood, is to profane the reality behind them. The symbols should never be mistaken for the reality itself. That would be idolatry!

And so, this morning as you receive Jesus’ Body and Blood – remember as you partake - and as the Lord did in the Upper Room – give thanks for the precious gift of the Real Presence of Jesus Christ - “*eucharisteo*” εὐχαριστέω.