

Lent Reflections on the Stained-Glass Windows



Holy Communion

Friday, the third week of Lent.

Reading: St Matthew 26:26-30

While they were eating, Jesus took a loaf of bread, and after blessing it he broke it, gave it to the disciples, and said, “Take, eat; this is my body.” Then he took a cup, and after giving thanks he gave it to them, saying, “Drink from it, all of you; for this is my blood of the^[a] covenant, which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins. I tell you, I will never again drink of this fruit of the vine until that day when I drink it new with you in my Father’s kingdom.” When they had sung the hymn, they went out to the Mount of Olives.

Commentary

Holy Communion is the heartbeat of the Church. Instituted by Christ, it makes the Church the Church, transforming a group of believers into the Body of Christ on earth. The 5th century Bishop of Hippo, St Augustine, writes in his ‘Confessions’ of hearing God say to him, “You will not change me into you, like food that your flesh eats, but you will be changed into me.” Centuries later, a Bishop of Rome wrote: “It is not possible to ‘eat’ the Risen One, present under the sign of bread, as if it were a simple piece of bread. To eat this Bread is to communicate, to enter into communion with the person of the living Lord. This communion, this act of ‘eating’, is truly an encounter between two persons, it is allowing our lives to be penetrated by the life of the One who is the Lord, of the One who is my Creator and Redeemer. The purpose of this communion, of this partaking, is the

assimilation of my life with his, my transformation and conformation into he who is living Love.” (Benedict XVI)

St Paul wrote to the Christians at Corinth: “Because there is one bread, we who are many are one body, for we all partake of the one bread.” (1 Cor 10:17). Christ unites Himself to each of us in the Eucharist, not just to me but to the person next to me and to the person next to them. Christ and my neighbour are inseparable in the Eucharist: ‘we are all one bread, one body.’

In the 1940’s, an Anglican Benedictine monk and priest of Nashdom Abbey, Dom Gregory Dix, wrote an influential history of the liturgy of the Eucharist. It led him to formulate what he called ‘the four-action shape of the liturgy.’ He underlined that throughout the ages Christians have followed the action of Jesus, as He gave the apostles the Eucharist at the Last Supper: ‘He took,’ (the offertory), ‘He blessed,’ (the consecration), ‘He broke’ (the fraction) and ‘he shared,’ (Holy Communion). It is a pattern which unfolds the drama of the Death and Resurrection of Jesus and offers it to us in the sacrament of the Eucharist so that our lives may be conformed to this pattern.

Mother Theresa of Calcutta believed strongly that she and her sisters could only do their work because of what they received at Mass each morning. The Christ they met in the Mass, they met again in the poor and needy on the streets: “Every Holy Communion fills us with Jesus and we must, with Our Lady, go in haste to give him to others. For her, it was on her first Holy Communion day that Jesus came into her life,

and so for all of us also. He made himself the Bread of Life so that we, too, like Mary, become full of Jesus. We too, like her, must be in haste to give him to others. We too, like her, serve others.”

Throughout the centuries, Christians in all times and places have found that Holy Communion has strengthened them in their own lives and also able to express the love Christ as they went into the world seeking the company of the lost and lonely, the sick and the needy, the marginalised and the unjustly treated

Meditation

In the passage from St Matthew above Jesus does four things. *He took, he blessed/gave thanks, he broke, he gave.* Through the celebration of the Eucharist Jesus is forever doing these four acts. Four moves which constitute that pattern of the Christian life.

Jesus *takes* our life and we gladly yield it to him;

Jesus *blesses* our life and infuses it with power, meaning, and joy;

Jesus *breaks* our life so that we are not our own but we belong to him;

Jesus *gives* our life back to us but now in a way that is wholly transformed.

Reflect for a moment on your participation in Holy Communion.

Are you gladly yielding your life to Christ?

What are you holding back?

How do you prepare yourself to receive the sacrament?

How has Christ blessed you in your life?

How have you been transformed and strengthened by the presence of Christ in the Eucharist?

What has it taught you?

Prayer

Almighty and Eternal God, behold I come to the sacrament of Your only-begotten Son, our Lord Jesus Christ. As one sick, I come to the Physician of life; unclean, to the Fountain of mercy; blind, to the Light of eternal splendour; poor and needy, to the Lord of heaven and earth. Therefore, I beg of You, through Your infinite mercy and generosity, heal my weakness, wash my uncleanness, give light to my blindness, enrich my poverty, and clothe my nakedness. May I thus receive the Bread of Angels, the King of Kings, the Lord of Lords, with such reverence and humility, contrition and devotion, purity and faith, purpose and intention, as shall aid my soul's salvation.

Most loving Father, grant that I may behold for all eternity face to face Your beloved Son, whom now, on my pilgrimage, I am about to receive under the sacramental veil, who lives and reigns with You, in the unity of the Holy Spirit, God, world without end. **Amen.**

A prayer before communion: St Thomas Aquinas