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Holy Eucharist and What It Means to Us

By The Very Rev. Canon Michael Penfield

In Article 28 of the Anglican Articles of Religion, the Anglican Church states that the "Supper of the Lord is not only a sign of the love that Christians ought to have among themselves, one to another, but rather it is a Sacrament of our Redemption by Christ's death: inasmuch that to such as rightly, worthily, and with faith, receive the same, the Bread which we break is a partaking of the Body of Christ; and likewise the Cup of Blessing is a partaking of the Blood of Christ." This doctrine is called the "Real Presence". But this doctrine is not uniquely Anglican. The Eastern Orthodox, the Roman Catholics, the Lutherans, the Methodists, and even the Reform Christians also believe in the Real Presence of Christ in the Eucharist.

What we as Anglicans believe is that, somehow, when the priest invokes the Holy Spirit to come and change the bread and the wine into the Body and Blood of Christ (the Epiclesis), and when the priest recites the Prayer of Consecration, which are Christ's own words repeated, somehow the bread and wine become the Body and Blood of Christ. We do not, however, try to define or describe the process like the Roman Catholic Church does with transubstantiation, or the Lutheran church does with

consubstantiation. Rather, like the Eastern Orthodox, we accept it as a mystery.

But, because the Anglican Church prefers to look at it as a great mystery and because of the scientific age we live in, many people are losing their appreciation of the mystery. The true nature of the Real Presence is essential to our faith. But I fear that many Anglicans believe it is just a memorial of the first Last Supper, with no real change to the bread and wine. And this is a great and grave error.

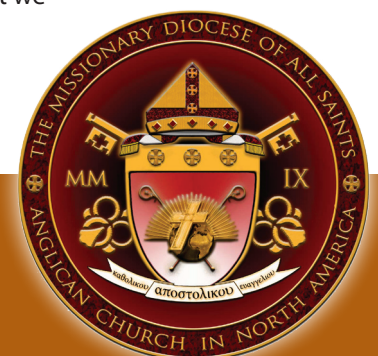
When the Apostles forbade the little children to come to Jesus, He said to them:

"Let the little children come to Me, and do not forbid them: for such is the kingdom of God. Assuredly, I say to you, whoever does not receive the kingdom of God as a little child will by no means enter it." [Luke 18:15-17]

What Jesus makes clear is that we need to accept things of heaven like a child, and not try to make it overly complex. I have seen explanations

The Convocation of the West Summary Statement

We are a missionary people living out the historical, Biblical Christian faith in the Anglican tradition.



of the Real Presence, trying to explain what “really” happens. These explanations are so complex that they make no sense. Transubstantiation is like that. Dividing what we see and what something really is makes the Eucharist way too complex. Likewise, I have read one Protestant explanation, which tried really hard not to say the bread and the wine becomes the Body and Blood of Christ. This explanation was akin to a type of Spiritual Communion that is imparted to us. It attempts to deny any real change to the substance, but rather somehow we receive Christ through the service. This is NOT accepting Holy Communion as a child.

Jesus said about the Bread “This is my Body.” Likewise, He said about the Wine “This is my Blood”. This seems clear. A child would understand this; so let us accept this as is. Jesus also said before the Last Supper:

“Most assuredly, I say to you, 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. My flesh is food indeed, and My blood is drink indeed. He who eats My flesh and drinks My blood abides in Me and I in him.” [John 6:53-56]

Even Jesus’ disciples thought this was a hard lesson, but then it was not until after Pentecost that they started to fully understand what Jesus was saying. However, any child would understand this. Somehow through the Holy Spirit, during the service of Holy Communion, the bread and the wine become the Body and Blood of Jesus. If you believe this, then you are a true Anglican. If you do not, then you need to examine your faith. But you also need to give yourself time to accept this great mystery. Like learning a foreign language, children are much better with learning, understanding and accepting mysteries than adults are.

You may be wondering why I am writing an article about this now; why do I have this sudden interest? I must say that the Covid Pandemic made clear to me how many people truly either do not understand or do not believe in the Real Presence. What I am about to write may be another “hard” lesson, but here it is: you cannot get a disease from the consecrated Host or the consecrated Wine.

We believe when the bread and wine are consecrated, it becomes the Body and Blood of Jesus. So tell me, why would someone who raised people from the dead, cured leprosy, or cured hemorrhaging cause you to contract a disease or a virus? Why would God Who created everything and Who is in control of all things NOT be in control in this situation? When Jesus was accused of exorcising demons through the power of Satan,

Jesus said that a kingdom divided against itself cannot stand. Evil cannot be against evil. This is also true for the Heavenly Kingdom in which Christ is King. Wouldn’t permitting evil through something good be a kingdom divided against itself? How can something as good as the Body and Blood of Christ cause you to become ill? It makes no sense. God would not permit it.

So why did so many priests and bishops stop giving communion or stop giving the wine or take extraordinary precautions during the Covid Crisis? Well, it depends. Many did it to prevent authorities from shutting their churches down (the lesser of two evils). Some faiths, such as Roman Catholics, have a long tradition of believing that the Body and Blood are in each and both elements. Thus, for centuries before Vatican II, Roman Catholics received the Eucharist in only one kind, the Host. This belief makes it easy for them to go back to this original method of receiving Christ without compromising their faith. But, I hate to admit it; I also believe that, in some cases, the priests truly didn’t

think out their faith and the implications of what they were doing. And finally, I suspect that some priests do not believe or do not understand the Real Presence and its implications.

The other thing, which must be kept in mind is that, although we cannot get diseases from the Body and



Blood of Jesus, we can from the Bishop, the Priest, the Deacon or the Eucharistic Minister. Thus, the wearing of masks by these individuals during the administration of the Eucharist to the people makes sense. Caution was called for, but where the line of demarcation must be drawn is where the implication is that we are receiving bread and wine and not the Body and Blood of Jesus.

So this is what I ask of each of us: please, look at how we are receiving the consecrated Host. Are we doing it in the full understanding that we are truly receiving the Body and Blood of our Redeemer, or are we receiving it as if it were just a memorial recreation of the original Last Supper? Do we fully understand the implications of this belief? Do we have faith – a faith that can move mountains – or is it strictly what we see is what we get? And if we do have faith, don’t you think it is time to move back to giving Communion in both kinds, understanding also that it may take time for some to get past their fears and time for others to accept the truth of our Belief? I do. It seems like such a small act of faith to take communion again as we once did. But I think we all can do this. I have faith. And I believe you all do too.

Amen.



By The Right Rev. Winfield Mott

“He was a peacemaker. He is a son of God.” Tatiana, an old lady among the thousands in line to pay her last respects to Mikael Gorbachev as he lay in state recently, made this comment. Many may have missed it, but the reference was clear. “Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called the sons of God,” said Jesus as he established the Christian moral code in the Beatitudes (Matthew 5:9).

The night before, Vladimir Putin had stood before the casket to also pay his respects. It made an interesting image: the current president, an Orthodox Christian, crossing himself before the previous president, an agnostic. The one, agnostic, was the recipient of the Nobel Peace Prize, very deservedly so, for having ended the Cold War and freed the nations of eastern Europe, all without firing a shot. The other, Christian, but not a likely candidate ever for a peace prize.

The irony is striking. Nor is the contrast unique to these two leaders. In our own country, there are non-believers who strive hard to be peacemakers, and Christians who eagerly seek strife and war. We see non-Christians advocating for better care of the environment, while many who call themselves Christian enable policies destructive to the planet. Since it is God’s earth, Christians obviously should be in the front ranks of those who seek to nurture and protect the planet and its treasures. There are, alas, many more examples of the contrast.

Jesus tells a parable about a father who had two sons who he asked to do a task (Matthew 21:28-31). The one responded that he would do it, but never did. The other rejected the father’s request, but then went and did the task after all. Which of these, asks Jesus, did the will of his father? We define orthodoxy as that which we correctly believe, such as the Nicene Creed. True enough, but James tells us, “Prove yourselves doers of the Word, and not merely hearers who delude themselves” (James 1:22).

In introducing the Nicene Creed in the historic liturgy of St. John Chrysostom, still used in Eastern Christianity, the priest urges, “Let us love one another, that we may with one mind, confess...” Orthodoxy is dynamic, not a matter of passively assenting to dogmas. “Love” is an action word, and to recite the Creed without love is a contradiction which destroys the unity of Faith, making it a contention of rigid assertions, not the active

harmony of a loving community.

The word “orthodoxy” itself does not mean “right belief.” “Ortho” in Greek refers to “straight” (your orthodontist, for instance, is a specialist in straight teeth). “Doxy” means “praise” (thus, “doxology,” a word of praise). To be orthodox is to offer right praise, to do your Liturgy in a God-pleasing way. If you think this is reserved for Sundays and Christmas, the word “liturgy” in Greek, as you may know, means the “work of the people.” Sunday is a day to orient yourself to God’s will. The rest of the week is dedicated to going out and doing that will, the work you offer to God. Finally, “doxa” is evolved from “odos” in Greek, meaning road. Ultimately, “orthodoxy” is to walk on the right road. Again, it is an action concept. Roads are to travel on, not to sit on. Sitting on a road is in fact a dangerous thing to do, even if you are well informed on where the road is going. But if you don’t go towards the destination, the knowledge cannot help you to choose the right road, unless you actually move and make the choice.

We live in a consumer paradise, which prides itself on offering us many choices of goods and services. The mindset includes how we choose a church, as churches and religious entities of all kinds market their “products” to us. People show up, and make a consumer choice, based perhaps on the quality of the “performance,” or on how much that church meets their needs and aligns with their opinions. If the church does not fulfill those requirements, people move to another choice.

But the Church is anything but a consumer paradise. There is no audience at all, unless there are visitors. The liturgy is specifically designed so that everyone, without exception, has a function to fulfill. Centuries of clericalism and sacerdotal ego have combined with the pressures of a consumer society to obscure the nature of worship as a participatory action. Priesthood became a career choice, the professional who tends to the perceived needs of the laity, to keep them as satisfied consumers of our “brand.” Laity comes from the Greek “laos,” people, and early Christians were called the “laos tou theou,” the people of God. In the new revision, they became “lay people,” those who are not professional or knowledgeable, similar to a lay person in medical terms, in contrast to the physician. In church, the laity were expected “pray, pay and obey,” and leave the rest to the career professionals.

It should not surprise us that this is not working well. In the consumer world, products well designed to attract the customer soon crowd other products out of the market. That means consumer churches must always perceive and meet the needs of their customer base to do well, to follow popular taste. A consumer choice, regardless of how well packaged, may not succeed when it announces that you are hopelessly mired in the stinking slime of your sin, and your only hope is to humble yourself before the Cross, following the suffering Servant in ways that counter your bias and prejudice, tell you to love unlovable people and walk a difficult road on which affluence and comfort is not at all the goal.

It is only when we grasp the basics that we can replicate the energy and fire of the early Church. Those basics are to understand that:

1) We are not called to simply attend church, we are called to BE Church, each of us a body part with our own function in the Body of Christ,

2) To be clergy is not a career, it is a vocation, much more like fatherhood than professional practice; it is one vocation among the many which serve within the people of God,

3) We do not “say” or “hear” Mass, we “do” Mass, all of us participating together, each with our distinct role; the celebrant presides, but we all celebrate,

4) Christianity is an action, a Way of life, not a religion,

5) The prime action in our life is God, who activates his love for us through the events of the Cross and Resurrection, conveyed to us in baptism (remember that the Cross and

Resurrection are actions, an enormous victory effort),

6) The appropriate response to God’s saving action gifted to us undeserving lost souls, is to love and thank God and in turn to love our neighbor as God has loved us,

7) Evangelism is not selling our product or brand; it is loving our neighbor by sharing the free gift of grace.

Love, as anyone who has tried it can tell you, is not a matter of walking a road of comfort and convenience. Genuine love does not fit into a consumer society. Love gives freely, even sacrificially (“Husbands, love your wives just as Christ also loved the Church and gave himself up for her,” Ephesians 5:25), while consumerism greedily acquires.

In the late Queen Elizabeth II, we have an example, a leader who combined the giving and peacemaking actions of a Gorbachev with the orthodox beliefs of a Putin, living a life of service and reconciliation which expressed her very firm Christian beliefs. Through history, there have indeed been many such examples. They serve as signposts on a pilgrim road of orthodoxy that was called “The Way” in early Christianity.

Action orthodoxy is combining a correct apprehension of creedal truth with the mandate, “let us love one another.” It expresses itself in eucharistic thanksgiving to God and then in serving one another and our neighbors (see, for example Matthew 25 and Matthew 5, the Beatitudes, but the options are unlimited). When churches try to be a consumer choice, they ultimately fail. When they become communities of the loving Savior, we can indeed rejoice and be exceedingly glad.



Request from Our Bishop Ordinary

Bishop Lipka has requested of all our churches to participate in the ReVive Church Health Assessment. It is through the Anglican Revitalization Ministries of the American Anglican Council. Those of you who were at the 2019 Clericus in Mesilla may remember Canon Mark Eldredge who is involved in this Ministry.

Please be advised that the Diocese will refund the \$100 out-of-pocket expenditure for your church’s health assessment. Also, each parish will receive an assessment for your particular church, which you may use for planning purposes. The Diocese will receive an assessment for the whole Diocese; plus each Convocation will receive one specific to it.

The assessment period runs from now until November 6th. Please finish the assessment by then.

As a final incentive which is particular ONLY to our Convocation, and it is an offer I made in 2019, if you would like Canon Eldredge to come out to your church to help, the Convocation of the West is willing to pay for your church. And remember, we are not doing this in hopes of being determined to be sustainable, but rather we are doing this in order to fulfill the Great Commission that each of us agreed to when we were Baptized.

I know that, knowing this assessment is what the Bishop wants, you all will get it done.

God bless,
Fr. Michael Penfield
Vicar General