

Homily for Maundy Thursday, 2020

1 Corinthians 11:23-32

'The Lord's Supper past, present and future'

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TEXT

²³ For I received from the Lord what I also handed on to you, that the Lord Jesus on the night when he was betrayed took a loaf of bread, ²⁴ and when he had given thanks, he broke it and said, "This is my body that is for you. Do this in remembrance of me." ²⁵ In the same way he took the cup also, after supper, saying, "This cup is the new covenant in my blood. Do this, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of me." ²⁶ For as often as you eat this bread and drink the cup, you proclaim the Lord's death until he comes.

²⁷ Whoever, therefore, eats the bread or drinks the cup of the Lord in an unworthy manner will be answerable for the body and blood of the Lord. ²⁸ Examine yourselves, and only then eat of the bread and drink of the cup. ²⁹ For all who eat and drink without discerning the body, eat and drink judgment against themselves. ³⁰ For this reason many of you are weak and ill, and some have died. ³¹ But if we judged ourselves, we would not be judged. ³² But when we are judged by the Lord, we are disciplined so that we may not be condemned along with the world.

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INTRODUCTION

There is much we remember on Maundy Thursday.

Jesus' washing of his disciples' feet and command to love one another.

Jesus' agonizing prayers in the garden of Gethsemane.

Jesus' betrayal and arrest in the darkness of night.

But another big focus for Maundy Thursday has always been, that final meal Jesus shared with his disciples...

The Passover,

Their Last Supper,

Where Jesus began for his Church what we call the Lord's Supper, or Holy Communion - the Sacrament of the Altar - the Eucharist.

It's this aspect of Maundy Thursday that I'd like to focus on this evening.

Now this may sound a bit strange,

After all,

We are in a time in the life of the Church where because of the COVID -19 pandemic, we are not currently able to gather together and celebrate Holy Communion.

So (I hesitated because...)

why rub it in, so to speak,

and preach on the blessings of the Lord's Supper, when we can't actually have it?!

But perhaps there's another way of looking at it.

Perhaps this is *exactly* the right time to preach on the Lord's Supper,
Where in its absence we grow in reverence and appreciation for it.

After all,
They say '*absence makes the heart grow fonder*'.

So perhaps during this time when we are *unable* to receive the Lord Jesus in his body and blood,
this is *just the time*,

to meditate on the Lord's Supper and its blessings and grow in our desire for it.

Tonight we do this by seeing how the Lord's Supper embraces the past, the present, and the future.

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PAST

First, the Lord's Supper embraces, for us, *the past*.

The reason we celebrate the Lord's Supper in the life of the Church is that after Jesus shared this meal with his disciples he said,
'Do this...'

This isn't optional,
Do this,
It's a command,
Even as the sacrament contains wonderful promises.

But notice the command is to '*do this in remembrance of me*',
In other words the ongoing action here which Christ wants to be happening until he returns,
Is based on something in the past,
Anchored in a historical event.

That event of course,
Is the suffering and death of Jesus,

This meal 'proclaims the Lord's death', St Paul says.

The Lord's Supper has been called the pulpit of the laity by some,
In other words,
Simply by participating in this sacrament you proclaim to each other and to the world the suffering and death of your saviour.

And it's not just that Jesus makes this connection between his death and the Lord's Supper,
But he gives this meal in that very context.

Remember when this all happened,

'On the night when he was betrayed',
Which means,

On the night before he died,

The context of Jesus giving us this sacrament is his being handed over into death,
And Jesus knows this.

He knows this is his last evening with his disciples.

Imagine you knew you were about to die,
And you had one last meal with your closest loved ones,
Wouldn't the gravity of that knowledge permeate everything you say and do?

Well that's this night for Jesus and his disciples.

This is the new covenant or new testament,
His last will and testament,
His final wishes if you like.

The Lord's Supper is at the heart of the Church's life,
Because the death and resurrection of Jesus are at the heart of the Church's life,

and that event though in the past,
is embraced by this sacrament for us.

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PRESENT

But next,
The Lord's Supper embraces the **present**.

As important as it is for us to see the deep connection between the Supper we regularly share together and
Jesus' death on the cross 2000 years ago,

We dare not turn this sacred meal into mere nostalgia for the past,

We don't just celebrate the Lord's Supper to think nice thoughts and feel nice emotions about what Jesus did
for us,

'Remembrance' in the Scriptures is not only about the past,
But about action in the present,
About real spiritual power ***in the present***.

What do we read,

Jesus took a loaf of bread, and when he had given thanks, he broke it and said,
'*This is my body, that is for you*'.

'*This is my blood which is shed for you for the forgiveness of sins*'.

Jesus does not speak of bread and wine which *symbolise* or *represent* his body and blood,

He says this is my body,
This is my blood,

As I tell our young people in teaching classes on the Lord' Supper,
To understand the Church's teaching of the real presence of Christ in Holy Communion,
You really only need to understand one basic grammatical truth,
That *is* means *is*.

In this Holy Sacrament He is present, *in the present*,
And he is present for you.

You encounter him in the bread and wine now as you receive his body and blood,

All that he did for you in the past,
As he was handed over into death for you and gave his life for your sins,

All the blessings of his new covenant,
forgiveness, life and salvation,

All of this is not locked away in the past,

But is available to you in the *present* as you come to the Lord's Supper,

And receive the very body given on the cross,
And the very blood which was shed,

now glorified in his resurrection from the dead.

In our catechism we confess simply:

What is Holy Communion?

*It is the real body and blood of our Lord Jesus Christ,
Given with bread and wine for us Christians to eat and drink.*

Now we don't claim to understand with our finite minds how such a wonderful thing is possible,
This is a mystery,
Where we take Jesus at his word.

You may remember how at the time of the Reformation this came into dispute,
and in a debate Luther is said to have simply written on the table in Latin,

'hoc est corpus meum'...
This is my body,

and would return to it again and again.

In other words,
we simply take the Lord Jesus at his word here.

The Lord's Supper embraces the past,
But it has real spiritual power in the present.

And it's only when you see this truth of the real presence of Christ in the Lord's Supper,
that this is the holy body and blood of Jesus we receive,
that's you'll make any sense of why the warnings St Paul's gives in this text are so serious,
about examining oneself before receiving,
about the importance of discerning the body of the Lord and eating and drinking judgment on ourselves.

We encounter Jesus himself in this sacrament,
And so we approach in reverence.

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FUTURE

The Lord's Supper embraces the past,
the present,
and the **future**.

Did you hear what St Paul said?

That as we do this we '*proclaim the Lord's death until he comes.*'

As the Lord's Supper reaches back into the past,
so it reaches forward into the future.

Our Holy Communion liturgy acknowledges this,

As we sing of this sacrament as a foretaste of the feast to come.

as we pray, 'Come Lord Jesus',

we pray for him to come to us now in the Lord's supper,

even as we pray for him to come again in glory.

And we trust that just as certainly as he came in the flesh to give his life on the cross and rise again from the dead,
and just as certainly as he comes to us in the bread and wine of the Sacrament,

just as surely he will come again,
to judge the living and the dead,
to save and redeem his people,

to bring us to the feast that knows no end,
of which this sacrament is but a foretaste.

That glorious future is depicted in Revelation,
where the angels and saints who are robed in white sing before the throne of the Lamb,
'*Holy holy holy is the Lord God almighty!
Who was, who is, and who is to come*'

And so as we celebrate the Lord's Supper we take the words of the angels on our lips,
we sing '*Holy holy holy*'

and as we do we confess that this future glory to which we have been called,
that future life with God where we will feast in the presence of the Lord,

is already now embraced for us in the Lord's Supper,

so that the past,
the present,
and the future come together.

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CONCLUSION

From time to time a husband and wife may be forced apart from one another,
Or for some reason like illness,
can't share the fullness of married life,

these can be difficult times,
but they can also be times when they grow in love and appreciation for each other and what they have.

So perhaps as we live through this strange time of not being able to celebrate Holy Communion and receive
the body and blood of Jesus,

Could it be,
that this is a time when God is leading us to repentance and spiritual renewal,

especially in a deeper reverence and appreciation for the gift of the body and blood of Jesus in the Lord's
Supper?

God grant it to us for Jesus' sake.

Amen.