

Being fed (The Ministry of the Sacrament)

20 6 10

Almighty and heavenly Father,
we thank you that in this wonderful sacrament
you have given us the memorial of the passion of your Son Jesus Christ.
Grant us so to reverence the sacred mysteries of his body and blood,
that we may know within ourselves
and show forth in our lives the fruits of his redemption.

My text today is from the gospel according to St John chapter 6 and verse 35:
'Jesus said to them, "I am the bread of life. Whoever comes to me will never be hungry, and whoever believes in me will never be thirsty."'

There are many good reasons to be here in France, not least the food and the drink. I love the bread; I love the wine. I love breakfast with fresh bread bought that morning from the bakers down the road. I love a glass of red wine with most meals – oddly enough not with breakfast. The joy of eating and drinking together is one of the great blessings of life. And it is to the bread and to the wine of our service that I turn today.

Today is the third of my series of sermons looking at our service of Holy Communion and trying to understand what we are doing; what is going on. We've looked at the preparation to worship through silence and in prayer: the Collect for

Purity and the General Confession and Absolution. Thus prepared, we are now prepared to listen to and to receive the Ministry of the Word, hearing God speak to us through the four readings from the Bible, the Word of God, and to hear the Word of God expounded in a sermon. Essentially, this is the first half of the service. The second half of the service which should reflect and balance the first is the Ministry of the Sacrament. In both, we are being fed by being reminded of the presence of God in our lives.

One of the differences between Catholics and Protestants is about the Real Presence of Christ in the Eucharist. Oddly enough, I don't want to go there and to explore the issue: you can and probably have decided for yourselves whether the bread and wine are literally the body and blood of Christ or whether they are reminders of his body and blood. Truly, all that really matters is whether the person celebrating, consecrating the bread and the wine is a priest in the Church of God who has been duly and properly ordained by a properly consecrated bishop. That is a central belief of the Anglican Communion and so it is important that my vocation as a priest is recognised by the People of God who make up our branch of the Church of God.

That said, let me focus on the bread and wine. They are both visual aids, sacraments if you prefer the theologically correct term. The bread is a wafer made by the sisters at the convent in Paramé, meant to be like the unleavened bread that Jesus used to celebrate that first Last Supper. The wine is red, fortified wine from Oporto in Portugal, meant to be like the red wine Jesus drank and shared with his friends at the same meal. Bread and wine, food and drink both

necessary staples to sustain life.

And that is what it's all about. Jesus is feeding us; we are being fed by his presence with us in the bread and the wine. The ordinary are being made holy and that is what a sacrament is and that is what the final prayer we say says - 'we thank you for feeding us with the body and blood of your son Jesus Christ'. What the Ministry of the Sacrament is doing is reminding us in a symbolic meal of Christ's sacrifice for us on the cross. The bread stands for his body broken on the cross for us. The wine stands for his blood shed on the cross for us. Whether you believe that is a literal or a symbolic does not matter so much as the fact that Jesus is present in this meal when we do this in remembrance of him - he is literally re-membered - put back together again in our hearts and in our minds by an act of love remembering an act of love.

The Ministry of the Sacrament is a vital part of our service because it brings the presence of Christ vividly to our attention through eating a tiny piece of bread and sipping a tiny drop of wine - quality not quantity. Just as bread and wine feeds our body, so too does the bread and wine of Holy Communion feed our souls. The Ministry of the Word feeds us with the word of God - the Bible - and the Ministry of the Sacrament feeds us with the Word of God, the body and blood of his Son Jesus Christ.

May we be fed at all our services so that we have the energy to do the will of God for us and for all his people.

I have spoken in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit,
Amen.

Preached at the Eucharist

St Bartholomew's Dinard

20th June, 2010

H: Sermon 22: Being fed

