

Maundy Thursday

I Corinthians 10:16-17

Communion is one weird word, is it not? I think most of us think we know what it is, though; communion is that thing we do in Church, when we eat a little bit of bread and drink a sip of wine, right? Well, it is. But the word *communion* itself is Latin, and it means something like *together-oneness*, or *oneness together*.

The Biblical Greek word we translate as *communion* can mean quite a few things; the word is *koinonia*, if anyone should be interested, and it is that, also, if nobody is. That word can mean many things, sharing in something, or having something in common; sometimes it is rendered as *participation*, *fellowship*, or even *partnership*. It cannot always be translated as *communion*, for sometimes that would not make sense, and is not what the author intends; and when it is not, it will usually be clear from the context. In most translations of Holy Scripture, though, it is quite clear to me that *koinonia* is not rendered *communion* as often as it should be.

The holy Apostle John uses the word *koinonia* when he writes that he and the other Apostles proclaim the Word of life *in order that you may have communion with us*, and also when he adds that *our communion is with the Father and with His Son Jesus Christ*. It is this reality our Baptismal Covenant refers to as *the communion of saints*; the reality of which the Apostle tells us that our Lord Jesus spoke when He prayed for those who, through the preaching of the Apostles, would come to believe in Him, *that they may all be one, just as you, Father, are in me, and I in you, that they also may be in us*.

Clearly there is more to this than *partnership* or *participation* as we would most commonly understand either, or even *fellowship*, more than merely having *something* in common; by the Word of life, those who hear it and take it to heart are not only united with each other in a common *faith*, we are actually taken into that very oneness of love which exists and existed from eternity between the Father and the Son; which means that we are made one with God! And it is by us all being made one with Him that we are one with one another, through His Word of life, which He has His Church proclaim.

The same reality is set before us as we hear the words of His holy Apostle Paul which we hear tonight, about *the cup of blessing which we bless being the communion of the blood of Christ* and *the bread we break being the communion of the body of Christ*.

Well, this really is given already with what the cup itself is, according to our Lord Jesus Himself, and the bread, is it not? Well, it is. *This is my blood!*, He said, and: *This is my body*. And when His blood is given to us to drink, and His body to eat, obviously it means that He is made one with us, does it not, and we with Him? Well, of course it does.

And so, clearly, *the cup of blessing which we bless* is more than *fellowship about the blood of Christ*, as some would like to understand it, and *the bread we break* more than *fellowship about the body of Christ*; it is even more than a *participation in the blood of Christ* and a *participation in the body of Christ*. It is indeed *the communion of the blood of Christ* and *the communion of the body of Christ*; it is Christians being made one with Him who is one with the Father from eternity, and so also with one another in the communion of Christ, that is: in His Church. It is the holy ones being made one with the Holy One through the holy things, by which we are holy, also, as He Himself is holy, free from all impurity, glorious with His own glory.

This is the reality of the Church of Christ, and of your life in Church, and your life in Christ; to be a Christian is to have been *called into the communion of Jesus Christ our Lord*, as the Apostle writes it earlier in his Letter. Worship is not a gathering of like-minded individuals, or somewhat like-minded, who have agreed to come together to do something Christian; that would be a worldly way of looking at the things of God. Rather, in Christian worship the Communion of Saints come together, those who have been made one with Christ, and have, though Him, been made one with each other. The Church of Christ is, as the Apostle writes it elsewhere, *His body and His fullness, who fills all in all*. Each congregation of His faithful Church is that; this is where He lives and gives Himself to you, and His salvation. Going to Church is not a *supplement* to your life with Christ, not an optional and additional source of inspiration and encouragement in living with Him, rather, it *is* your life with Him! And we are not free to discard each other, as little as we are to discard Himself; as we also hear it tonight that the Apostle writes it: *Because there is one bread, we, who are many, are one body, for we all partake in the one bread*.

Nor is the preaching and teaching of the Church of Christ an optional additional source of inspiration from which you are free to take away whatever you find useful and whatever confirms the opinions you already had, and on the other hand disregard whatever you did not already think.

The preaching of His faithful Church is *the power of God unto salvation*, as the Apostle writes it, that is: the Word of the cross is, of how the Son of God, God Himself from eternity, had Himself born into our kind and baptised with the Baptism of sinners to make Himself one with us, and with our sin, also, and have us baptised into Him and His righteousness, that is: His goodness and innocence before God, how He had Himself crucified clothed in the sin of sinners to suffer His own judgement against sin, and save us from it, from eternal dying into that deep despair which is Hell, and have us share with Him instead in all that is His, His heavenly glory and His eternal life.

With His Word of how He has made Himself one with us to make us one with Him He brings it about that we are made one with Him, in that His Spirit becomes ours, and His innermost self; with His Word of His love and what His love has done for us, He breathes His Holy Spirit into us, who is Himself, and His love, and His life, so that He Himself lives in us, with His love and His life. Therefore is it that, as the Apostle also writes it, although in another Letter, *faith comes from hearing, and hearing comes by the Word of Christ*. Christian preaching is not only inspiration and encouragement, it actually is *communion with Christ*; through it, His life lives in us, so that we live in Him, and shall, for ever, in His heavenly Kingdom and His eternal life.

Our salvation is *communion with Him*: that we are made one with Him in all that is His, who made Himself one with us in all that was ours.

And as our salvation is our communion with Him, so is that which we most commonly call *communion* our salvation.

As we heard it earlier, and shall hear it again later, that our Lord Jesus said it on the night in which He was given over to suffer and die for our salvation: *This is my body, which is given for you; this cup is the new covenant in my blood, which is shed for you*. The cup is the new covenant, that is: it is the very salvation by which God resolved in His heart from eternity to reveal the fullness of His goodness and rescue and restore sinners to His glory, and for which the Son shed His blood! The cup of blessing which we bless is the communion of the blood of Christ. The bread we break, is the communion of the body of Christ. Now, it matters not that we do not actually *break* the bread; for what *breaking bread* means in Holy Scripture is to *share bread*, which is also the point the Apostle makes with the words we hear tonight: *Because there is one bread, we, who are many, are one body, for we all partake in the one bread*.

We all partake in the same bread because we are in communion with the same Christ; His Spirit is in us by means of His Word, and His body is in our bodies, His blood in our blood; and so the Church is *His body and His fullness, who fills all in all*. And this is all for real, not just something that we say in Church; it is what God Himself teaches in Holy Scripture, as all that we say in Church should be, and is.

Therefore is it, also, that we cannot share communion with those with whom we are not *in* communion, that is: with those with whom we are not united in a common faith and submission to the Truth of God; because we who partake in the bread are thus being made to be one body with Christ, and in Him. And to allow those who will not submit to Him in the obedience of faith to partake in the one bread is not only to deceive them and encourage them to continue on paths that lead to Hell, it is also to make ourselves not only complicit, but one with them in their disobedience; even worse, it is to blaspheme against Christ Himself, and His body and blood, and His salvation!

Therefore is it that the Apostle would write as he does in another Letter to the same congregation, continuing the same line of thinking: *Do not be unequally yoked with unbelievers. For what has righteousness in common with lawlessness? What communion has light with darkness? And what accord has Christ with Belial? What part has a believer with an unbeliever? And what agreement has the Temple of God with idols? For you are the Temple of the living God. And therefore is it that he has already commanded the Corinthians not to join yourself to anyone called a brother who is sexually immoral, or covetous, or an idolater, or a reviler, or a drunkard, or an extortioner, and certainly not to eat with such a person.*

For those, though, who, have been overcome by the love of God, so that we have come to submit to His love in the obedience of faith so as to seek our salvation in the Word and worship of His salvation, for us it is a joyful thing to celebrate our salvation with other sinners with whom we have His salvation in common, because we have the faith in common, and to celebrate *that* we have His salvation in common, so that we can celebrate *their* salvation, also, as well as our own, and celebrate our unity in the faith, under the assurance that, as the Apostle also writes it, *God is faithful, by whom you were called into the communion of His Son, Jesus Christ our Lord.*

O Christ, our God, Lamb of God, who have borne, and take away, the sin of the world, have mercy upon us! *Amen.*