

Homily for Trinity XII 2021 - The Eucharist as Prayer

The Lord Jesus Christ, on the night when he was betrayed took bread and when he had given thanks, he broke it, and said, "This is my body which is broken for you, do this in remembrance of me" In the same way also the cup, after supper, saying, "This cup is the new covenant in my Blood do this as oft as you drink it in remembrance of me." For as often as you eat this bread and drink this cup you proclaim the Lord's death until he comes. I Cor 13: 24-26

These words are very familiar to us and rightly so, for Sunday by Sunday and day by day from the day of Pentecost, the church has obeyed the Lord's command to 'do this.' Today we 'do this' with five people present. When, please God, we are able to return again to participation in the life and worship of the church, what will we do? We will 'do this' whatever else we do, of that we can be certain.

So, at the outset, in this brief reflection on the Eucharist as prayer, its worth remembering that prayer is something that we 'do.' It's an action, it is not merely thoughts, hopes, words and sentiments that happen in our minds ... it's something we do. *In obedience to Jesus Christ and in union with the faith of the Apostles what we 'do' at every Eucharist or Mass is, we "proclaim the Lord's death until he comes."*

Remember mention of the Greek word '*anamnesis*' earlier in this series of addresses. Understanding its meaning and owning that meaning (by which I mean taking its full meaning to heart) as a sincere orthodox believer and as an orthodox church is so very important.... its essential, really .. to coming to a full understanding of the Eucharist as Prayer. To re-cap then, when our Bibles say '*do this in remembrance of me*', they are translating the word *anamnesis* as 'remembrance.' Unfortunately the word remembrance is rather inadequate as remembering something tends to bring to our minds a past event that we can recollect. For example, many of us participate in a 'remembrance' of men and women who lost their lives defending our nation in time war on Anzac Day and Remembrance day.

The word *Anamnesis* has a much more active and dynamic meaning. Fully translated it really means.... '*to make my presence among you truly real.*' When the church does as the Lord has commanded we should, in the fourfold action of the Eucharist, the entirety of the saving action of Jesus Christ.... his birth, his life, his passion, his death, his burial, his resurrection and his ascension is made truly present. That's why we speak of the '*real presence*' of Christ in the Eucharist.

To understand The Eucharist as Prayer it is also necessary to think again about the word '*sacrifice*.' The desire to offer something to God as an expression of our love, our sorrow, our thanksgiving, our gratitude and so forth is something deep within the core of our being as human believers. Any such offerings that we make, no matter how small and inadequate they may be, are a sacrifice - an offering to God. For example: One might donate a new chalice or vestment or ornament to the church, that's a small sacrifice. One might make a vow to support a worthy cause on a weekly or monthly basis for one's lifetime ... that's a sacrifice. These actions cost us something. In the ancient world, as we know, the action of offering an animal's life to God as a sacrifice was common in many religions, Judaism especially. But here's the rub with all of those sacrifices...they don't do much. For example, our gifts and support of charities, worthy though they usually are, show our good intentions to God but nothing more than that. Some of the sacrifices offered in ancient times, the animal sacrifices in particular, did precisely nothing. However, and this is the heart and soul of the Eucharist as mystery, sacrifice, presence and prayer... Jesus Christ in the total surrender of his being, his self, his life in sacrifice to God has reconciled us to God. He has won the world's salvation. Our Lord's entire life was one of self-emptying. This defining

characteristic of His entire being came to its climax in His self-surrender on the cross. There he handed his life over to the Father, offering Himself unreservedly on behalf of the whole of humanity and the entire creation and thus bringing about their reconciliation with God. Every person who is repentant and who believes in Jesus Christ as Lord and Saviour does have something pre-eminently worthwhile to offer to God...it is the Sacrifice of Jesus Christ.

The writer of the Epistle to the Hebrews sums this up magnificently saying: "*Christ holds his priesthood for ever, because he continues for ever. Consequently He is able for all time to save those who draw near to God through Him. Since He always lives to make intercession for them.*" Hebrews 7: 25-26. It is the risen, ascended, glorified, living Lord Jesus Christ who by his total surrender on the cross and His three day's death in the tomb, won the world's salvation; He it is who is truly present to us and with us in the Eucharist, making intercession for us. The Eucharist is Prayer, it is prayer like no other, because it is Jesus Christ Himself who prays and Jesus Christ Himself who, in the Eucharist, eternally offers Himself to the Father.

What greater prayer is there, what greater prayer could there possibly be, than the prayer of a perfect life surrendered to the Father? There is none and there can be none! It is for this reason that throughout almost 2 millennia now, faithful Christians have placed the action of Eucharist front and centre in their lives. In every conceivable human circumstance from a coronation to an execution, from birth to death and beyond, Christian people turn to the greatest prayer there is - the Holy Mass - because Jesus Christ is truly and really present interceding for us in this great action of the church. The prayer of Jesus Christ crucified, risen and ascended is ours..in the Eucharist.

Dear faithful people, we certainly live in strange and uncertain times. Very few these days are willing to predict much at all about just what the future might hold. In such times it can be a comfort and a source of great hope to reflect that there have been, and there are, millions of entirely obscure men and women like us, every single one with his or her own individual hopes and fears and joys and sorrows and loves – and sins and temptations and prayers. They were once alive as we are now. They have left not the slightest trace in this world, not even a name, but have passed to God entirely forgotten in this mortal world of matter and time. Each one of them once believed and prayed as we do. They found it hard as we do. They grew slack and sinned as we do. They repented and fell again as we do. Each one of them worshipped at the Eucharist and there, all their human weaknesses and failures notwithstanding, they recognised the Lord Jesus Christ in the breaking of the bread and they worshipped Him.

The Eucharist is indeed the greatest of all prayers because in it we unite ourselves with the entirety of the life of Jesus Christ and His prayer for us. Especially His prayer upon the cross of Calvary. Those words of Christ on the cross are part of every Eucharist... His Prayer for our forgiveness.... '*Father, Forgive them, for they know not what they do'*... His prayer of faith and trust... '*into thy hands I commit my Spirit*'... His prayer for our share in eternal glory... '*you will be with me in paradise*'.... His prayer of dereliction.... '*My God, my God why hast thou forsaken me*' and His prayer of a mortal life completed.... '*it is finished!*'