

**ST. JOHN'S EPISCOPAL CHURCH
COMPASS, PA**

April 14, 2022 – MAUNDY THURSDAY, YR. C

The Rev. Dr. Nina George-Hacker

Homily: “*More than a Memorial: Christ with Us*”*

Exodus 12:1-4, 11-14 (The Passover of God)
Psalm 116:1, 10-17 (The psalmist offers to God thanksgiving and praise for all He has done)
1 Corinthians 11:23-26 (Christ institutes the Holy Eucharist)
St. Luke 22:14-30 (Jesus and His disciples' Last Supper)

Happy Thanksgiving! No, I did not pull out last November's sermon by mistake. Maundy Thursday, the night on which Our Lord instituted the Holy Eucharist, is “Thanksgiving Day” for all Christian believers. The very word “Eucharist” comes from the Greek “*evcharisto*,” meaning, “thanks be given.” Indeed, we begin each Eucharistic liturgy with the prayer known as The Great Thanksgiving, in which we are enjoined to “*Give thanks* unto our Lord God.”

Jesus could have gone to the Cross and died for our sins without having shared a last meal with His disciples; He could have been crucified without instituting the Eucharist. Through Christ's sacrificial death, our sins would have been atoned for, and our salvation assured. So why would Jesus give us that Holy Communion which we now crave so dearly that we don't even like to come to church if it is not available? Part of the answer is found in what are called “the Words of Institution,” in which Jesus says, “Do this in remembrance of me.”

Agreed. This Sacrament is a way for us to never forget Jesus' precious death and sacrifice for the sins of the whole world. But it is *so much more than a memorial!* That's because Christ, through the mystery of His grace, made it possible for Him to remain with us always, present in His body, blood, soul, and divinity upon the altar, as well as in our church's tabernacle. In His great mercy, Our Lord did not intend to leave His followers bereft of His loving, comforting, guiding, healing presence. And the Holy Eucharist is *one of the ways* in which Jesus remains present with us.

For 2,000 years, theological debates have raged about *how* Jesus is present in the Eucharist. While all Christians have some respect for the bread and wine that are given to them by the clergy— and St. Paul urges us not to receive this Sacrament without faith—not all truly believe in what we Anglicans call the “Real Presence” of Christ. Historically, Anglicans have dodged the issue of precisely “how” Jesus is present, taking our cue from Queen Elizabeth I, who, when questioned about Christ's presence in the Sacrament, declared simply:

“T’was God the word that spake it,
He took the Bread and brake it;
And what the word did make it;
That I believe, and take it.”

When, at the start of their final meal together, Jesus shared the bread with His friends, saying the words, “This is my body which is broken for you, do this in remembrance of me” and then did similarly with a cup of wine as the meal ended, He was not commanding them to do a new thing. Every formal Jewish meal began with blessing, breaking, and sharing bread, and concluded with giving thanks over a cup of wine to share. Jesus was not instructing His friends to perform a new action. Rather, Jesus was instructing them that whenever they would do this after His death, this action would take on a radically new meaning.

This new meaning was expressed through the Hebrew and Aramaic languages that Jesus and the Disciples spoke, which regularly used “body” for “person” and similarly, identified “blood” with “life.” So, it was not all that strange when Jesus broke the bread and offered the cup of wine, saying:

“This is me—my self and my life; I am giving you my self and my life; and you will have Me whenever you do this in remembrance of Me.”¹

In Jesus’ self-giving for us, there is also a call to give away ourselves and our lives in the service of others, in remembrance of Him. When we allow Jesus to take us, give thanks for us, bless us, then break and remake us, we are empowered and equipped to carry Christ from the altar to the streets so that we can share ourselves with others, feeding them with physical and spiritual food, even as Christ has nourished us.

Father Bosco Peters, an Anglican priest in New Zealand, writes: “The strongest Anglican affirmation that I know ... of the bread being Christ’s body, and the wine [being] Christ’s blood, is in the New Zealand Prayer Book ... [it’s] the Prayer after Communion for the Day of Pentecost:

Praise and glory to You Creator Spirit of God; You make our bread Christ’s body
to heal and reconcile and to make us the body of Christ.
You make our wine Christ’s living sacrificial blood to redeem the world.
You are truth. You come like the wind of heaven, unseen, unbidden.
Like the dawn You illuminate the world around us; You grant us a new beginning every day.
You warm and comfort us. You give us courage and strength beyond our every day resources.
Be with us Holy Spirit in all we say or think, in all we do this and every day. Amen.”²

If we do not believe that we truly receive Jesus in Communion, then what is the point of partaking of the bread and wine? But if we do truly believe that we receive Jesus in the Holy Eucharist, then why are we not more eager to share Him with others? Why are we not busting out of church to carry the truth, mercy, and love of Christ with those who need it most?

As you go from Our Lord’s Table tonight, remember that you, too, are blessed and broken by Jesus, so that you may be nourishing bread for a hurting and hungry world, given for the life of that world, in remembrance of Him.

Happy Thanksgiving! Amen.

* Adapt. N. George-Hacker, 2 April 2015, St. Christopher’s Episcopal Church, Cobleskill NY. Used with permission.

¹ Adapt. Bosco Peters, “Christ’s Eucharistic Presence,” 2011, [Liturgy](http://www.liturgy.co.nz/reflection/586a.html) <<http://www.liturgy.co.nz/reflection/586a.html>> 1 April 2015.

² *Ibid.*