

Sermon for Morning Prayer The Twentieth Sunday After Trinity

I. Lessons:ⁱ

A. The First Lesson: Here beginneth the thirty-second Chapter of the Second Book of Moses, Called Exodus.ⁱⁱ

“And when the people saw that Moses delayed to come down out of the mount, the people gathered themselves together unto Aaron, and said unto him, Up, make us gods, which shall go before us; for as for this Moses, the man that brought us up out of the land of Egypt, we wot not what is become of him. And Aaron said unto them, Break off the golden earrings, which are in the ears of your wives, of your sons, and of your daughters, and bring them unto me. And all the people brake off the golden earrings which were in their ears, and brought them unto Aaron. And he received them at their hand, and fashioned it with a graving tool, after he had made it a molten calf: and they said, These be thy gods, O Israel, which brought thee up out of the land of Egypt. And when Aaron saw it, he built an altar before it; and Aaron made proclamation, and said, Tomorrow is a feast to the LORD. And they rose up early on the morrow, and offered burnt offerings, and brought peace offerings; and the people sat down to eat and to drink, and rose up to play.

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“And Moses turned, and went down from the mount, and the two tables of the testimony were in his hand: the tables were written on both their sides; on the one side and on the other were they written. And the tables were the work of God, and the writing was the writing of God, graven upon the tables. And when Joshua heard the noise of the people as they shouted, he said unto Moses, There is a noise of war in the camp. And he said, It is not the voice of them that shout for mastery, neither is it the voice of them that cry for being overcome: but the noise of them that sing do I hear.

“And it came to pass, as soon as he came nigh unto the camp, that he saw the calf, and the dancing: and Moses' anger waxed hot, and he cast the tables out of his hands, and brake them beneath the mount. And he took the calf which they had made, and burnt it in the fire, and ground

it to powder, and strawed it upon the water, and made the children of Israel drink of it....

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“And it came to pass on the morrow, that Moses said unto the people, Ye have sinned a great sin: and now I will go up unto the LORD; peradventure I shall make an atonement for your sin. And Moses returned unto the LORD, and said, Oh, this people have sinned a great sin, and have made them gods of gold. Yet now, if thou wilt forgive their sin –; and if not, blot me, I pray thee, out of thy book which thou hast written. And the LORD said unto Moses, Whosoever hath sinned against me, him will I blot out of my book. Therefore now go, lead the people unto the place of which I have spoken unto thee: behold, mine Angel shall go before thee: nevertheless in the day when I visit I will visit their sin upon them.”

Here endeth the First Lesson.

B. The Second Lesson: Here beginneth the fourteenth Verse of the tenth Chapter of the First Epistle of Blessed Paul the Apostle to the Corinthians.ⁱⁱⁱ

“... Wherefore, my dearly beloved, flee from idolatry. I speak as to wise men; judge ye what I say. The cup of blessing which we bless, is it not the communion of the blood of Christ? The bread which we break, is it not the communion of the body of Christ? For we being many are one bread, and one body: for we are all partakers of that one bread. Behold Israel after the flesh: are not they which eat of the sacrifices partakers of the altar? What say I then? that the idol is any thing, or that which is offered in sacrifice to idols is any thing? But I say, that the things which the Gentiles sacrifice, they sacrifice to devils, and not to God: and I would not that ye should have fellowship with devils. Ye cannot drink the cup of the Lord, and the cup of devils: ye cannot be partakers of the Lord’s table, and of the table of devils. Do we provoke the Lord to jealousy? are we stronger than he?”

Here endeth the Second Lesson.

II. Text:

From the Second Lesson: “The cup of blessing which we bless, is it not a participation in the blood of Christ? The bread which we break, is it not a participation in the body of Christ? Because there is one bread, we who are many are one body, for we all partake of the one bread.”^{iv}

In the Name of the Father, and of the ☩ Son, and of the Holy Ghost. *Amen.*

III. Introduction, Theme and Development:

One of the persistent pastoral problems that we in the Continuing Church movement have with our own parishioners is that of explaining why we cannot share the fellowship of the altar – that is, why we cannot be “in communion” – with some other groups that, to the uninstructed eye, appear superficially similar to ours. Sometimes this issue arises when one of our people is about to leave on vacation and is looking for places on his or her journey to go to church on Sundays while away from home.

Sometimes it arises when one of our people has relatives or friends who have remained behind in the places, the dust of which we have shaken from our feet, and our interlocutor either wishes to attend church with these connections or is having trouble explaining to them why we discourage him or her from doing so. And, quite frequently, the issue arises out of a sincere but misguided desire to see all groups that appear in any way “traditional” or “conservative” – without being too particular about the definition of those loaded words – united in bonds of sacramental fellowship if not, for the time being, in one judicatory or administrative structure.

Explaining the reasons for impaired fellowship is relatively easy when the other group in question is one of those that purports to “ordain” women to its “sacramental” ministry, or when it uses the 1979 “Prayer Book” – even Rite I of that book – or both. It requires a bit more nuance to explain why, even when a particular group ordains only men and uses an authentic edition of the Book of Common Prayer, barriers remain if it does not possess an undoubted Apostolic Succession.

And these standards refer to what a church jurisdiction as a whole does, not just to what is done in one small subdivision of that group. No matter how “traditional” or “conservative” the members of an particular parish or diocese may think themselves to be, if it is part of a larger body that has strayed into teaching revisionist theology or following revisionist practices, or, like some Lambeth-affiliated provinces in Africa, is “in communion with” such bodies, then it is not one with which serious Catholic Christians can have the deepest form of Christian fellowship, that of the altar.

At the present time, into this category fall not only the old Protestant Episcopal Church in the USA, by whatever name it is using this week, the Anglican Church of Canada, and the other members of that Lambeth Communion which tolerates the deviations of PECUSA, the Anglican Church of Canada, or the other provinces they have infected. What is sometimes difficult for our people to understand is that into this category fall also the bodies of “Neoanglicans” such as the new Anglican Church in North America, also known as ACNA, and its constituencies such as the Convocation of Anglicans in America, or CANA, and the Anglican Mission in America, or AMiA, despite those bodies’ identification of themselves as “traditionalists” or “conservatives”.

These latter groups think they have maintained the traditional Catholic Faith because they protest against PECUSA’s tolerance – indeed, active promotion – of one particular form of moral degeneracy but, in all other important respects, they are following precisely the same path as did PECUSA.

Some think the Continuing Churches’ stance on these matters is wholly negative, that is, purely a rejection of beliefs and practices we find unacceptable. It is, however, fundamentally just the opposite of such negativity: it is, instead, the product of a *positive* desire to conform ourselves to the truths taught, and the actions demanded, by the Lord Jesus Christ, the One Who we believe founded the Church and laid down its essential operating principles.

The distinction is between those who believe that the Church is a divine institution, Christ's Body into which He has called us, and those who believe it is a human construct, a mere association of like-minded persons who have banded together for mutual convenience, a sort of high-minded country or tennis club. If we are in the first group, if we truly believe, as all Christians believed until the early 16th Century, that the Church is of divine origin, then we must take very seriously our obligation not to introduce into it innovations whenever the fancy strikes us but, instead, *always* to seek the Will of its founder and to do not what pleases us but what is demanded of us by Him.

It is in this spirit that today's Collect prays "that we, being ready both in body and soul, may cheerfully accomplish those things which thou commandest...."^v

Another way of putting this is that, if we are to be Catholic Christians in the traditional sense, we must believe the truth of, and take to heart, what St. Paul told the Corinthians in today's Second Lesson: "Because there is one bread, we who are many are one body, for we all partake of the one bread."^{vi}

According to Paul, it is precisely the act of taking communion that constitutes us as the Body of Christ, or the Church. And like many a mathematical proposition, this formulation can be reversed and yet remain true: the Body of Christ consists of those who take the communion of the bread and wine that are blessed in the special *anamnesis* [**ahn-amm-NAY-siss**].

Anamnesis [**ahn-amm-NAY-siss**] is the Greek word that is translated in our Eucharistic rite as "memorial" and "remembrance" but its meaning is far broader and deeper than those words are in modern English. It means not just a reënactment of a past event but an actual *participation* in that earlier event.

One of the primary factors that today distinguishes Catholic Christians from Protestant ones is this matter of the nature of the Eucharist: Catholics believe it is an actual sacramental *participation* in both the Last Supper and in Our Lord's Sacrifice on Calvary while Protestants believe it is a mere *symbol or sign* of those events. This

special participatory feature of the Eucharist is based upon what Paul says in the very next Chapter of this same Epistle:

“[T]he Lord Jesus, 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 often 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.”^{vii}

Everyone here should recognize these words as the basis for the “Words of Institution” from the “Canon of Consecration” that are contained in “The Order for the Administration of the Lord’s Supper or Holy Communion”.^{viii} It is precisely because this taking of sacramental communion is what makes us Catholics, that is, constitutes us members of the Universal Church that is wholly under the authority of Christ, that we cannot share it in a way that would falsely declare that others are likewise members who, in important respects, reject Our Lord’s authority and replace it with their own.

V. Conclusion:

In the same passage that forms today’s Second Lesson, St. Paul tells the Corinthians: “You cannot drink the cup of the Lord and the cup of demons. You cannot partake of the table of the Lord and the table of demons.”^{ix} While there Paul is addressing the specific issue of Christians’ participating in the sacramental aspects of pagan worship^x, the same principle applied to pagans’ participating in Christian worship.

And, just as it then forbade Christians to engage in pagan worship, so, today, it forbids Catholic Christians, those who accept the plenary authority of Christ, to engage in the sacramental worship of those who, despite calling themselves Christians, nevertheless reject that plenary authority. As always, we are constrained by the clear ramifications of this most important of Paul’s teachings, however exclusionary or socially uncomfortable those implications may appear:

“The cup of blessing which we bless, is it not a participation in the blood of Christ? The bread which we break, is it not a participation in the body of Christ? Because there is one bread, we who are many are one body, for we all partake of the one bread.”^{xi}

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The Rev'd Canon John A. Hollister, J.D.^{xii}
October 17, 2010.

ⁱ *Psalms and Lessons for the Christian Year (1943), THE BOOK OF COMMON PRAYER xxxvi (PECUSA 1928, rev. 1943).*

ⁱⁱ *Exodus 32: 1-6, 15-20, 30-34 (KJV).*

ⁱⁱⁱ *I Corinthians 10: 14-22 (KJV).*

^{iv} *I Corinthians 10: 16-17 (RSV).*

^v *The Twentieth Sunday after Trinity, The Collects, Epistles, and Gospels To be used throughout the Year, THE BOOK OF COMMON PRAYER 217 (PECUSA 1928, rev. 1943).*

^{vi} *I Corinthians 10: 17 (RSV).*

^{vii} *I Corinthians 11: 23b-26 (RSV).*

^{viii} *The Order for the Administration of the Lord's Supper or Holy Communion, THE BOOK OF COMMON PRAYER 80 (PECUSA 1928, rev. 1943).*

^{ix} *I Corinthians 10: 21 (RSV).*

^x *Paul's reference to meat that "that has been offered in sacrifice" refers to the pagans belief that sharing in the eating of sacrificial animals constituted a sharing in the life of the god or gods to whom they had been offered, a sort of proto-sacramental concept.*

^{xi} *I Corinthians 10: 16-17 (RSV).*

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