

Sharing in Christ

A sermon preached by the Reverend Robert Bruce Edson Saint John's Episcopal Church, Franklin, Massachusetts, on Maundy Thursday, April 1, 2010.

Then he took a loaf of bread and when he had given thanks, broke it and gave it to them, "This is my body which is given for you, do this in remembrance of me." Luke 22:19

As we walk with Christ in the events of his last days among his disciples, we join with him and the disciples in commemorating the institution of this great sacrament. Whether you call it the Lord's Supper, the Holy Communion, the Eucharist or the Mass, by any other name, our sharing of these elements of bread and wine is in remembrance of Christ.

The scene was simple: a low table was prepared for the twelve with the traditional foods of that time. According to the ancient custom in the Middle East, meals were eaten while in a reclining position on the floor. This was the last time that Jesus would share a meal with them and he wanted to leave them something by which they could remember him. After supper, Jesus took the bread and broke it and distributed among them, saying, "When you eat this, you are remembering my whole person in given for you." He then took the cup of wine and passed it among them saying, "When you share this cup, you are remembering that my blood was shed for you. Do this to remember me." And so it has been that in this great act of thanksgiving to God and offering of ourselves, we remember all that the person of Christ Jesus does for us. It was all very simple and always will be.

The manner and form may vary among Christian traditions, but the meaning and intent is the same: this is the central act of Christian worship which Jesus asked us to do whenever we gather in his name. Christ is really present in these basic elements of bread and wine which we share. This is the *anamnesis*, in which Christ is made present in the most real way in the believing community.

This day, Maundy Thursday, takes its name from *mandatum novum*, the Latin for "new commandment." Jesus' new commandment is a mandate to his disciples that they should learn to love one another as he loved them. We learn to love one another by respecting each other deserving of God's love. We don't have to like everyone, that's impossible, but we can learn to respect each other no matter what we may feel about them nor how much we may disagree with them. Christian love is being able to respect the dignity of every human being, particularly when we are not feeling very good about ourselves. It means being willing to put aside our differences, disagreements, grudges and hurts, no matter how righteous we may feel. All this takes work, especially with those we think are wrong headed who come at life from a completely different standpoint. There are no loopholes or exceptions to this commandment. We are to let go of our anger and resentment as we would want others to let go of theirs. We really have no choice because of God's unconditional love for us.

The word Eucharist comes from the Greek, *eucharistia*, which means thanksgiving. Inside of that word is *charis* which means grace. To have a real sense of God's grace is far more than being polished and charming. It is to possess those qualities of love for the least loved and the most unlovable among us. If such a quality of unconditional love were cultivated among God's people, we could have a far better world.

Think of it. Jesus was willing to die for the likes of you and me. Think of the person whom you love most in this world and how you would be willing to give your life for that

person. That's how Jesus was willing to die for us. He did this as the supreme example of his sacrificial love for us. When we take these outward and visible signs of Christ's presence in the bread and wine we offer ourselves in return in thanksgiving and service to all God's people.

We must be continually alert and aware to the ways in which we can be of service to others. Be available to those in need with the same unconditional love you have received. Do so in remembrance of him who gave himself for us that we might have life and have it abundantly.