

TRINITY NEWS

WEEK 21
May 22, 2022

Thoughts on the Sacraments (3)

Holy Communion

Holy Communion, the Eucharist, the Lord's Supper, the Mass, the Divine Liturgy, whatever name you use for it, is considered by most Christians to be apex of Christian worship, the Queen of the Sacraments. It is certainly something that Jesus expressly commands for us to do; "Do this, in remembrance of me." Even non-liturgical churches have trouble getting around that, and all, except the Quakers, as far as I know, honor it in some way or another.

Anglicanism teaches the Real Presence of Christ in the Eucharist: that is why we treat the bread and wine, once they are consecrated, with reverence; they must be either consumed, or safely stored in the aumbry for consumption at later time with a candle or red light to remind us what the aumbry contains. It cannot simply be thrown away.

We remain, however purposely vague as to how this Real Presence happens. We teach that it is a profound Mystery beyond our ability to explain: as the well-known priest-poet John Donne puts it:

"He was the word that spake it,
He took the bread and brake it;
And what his Word did make it
I do receive and take it."

In other words: He said "This is my Body...this is my Blood," so that's what it is. We won't go farther than that.

Anglicans then, would hold that that both the Roman Catholic doctrine of Transubstantiation and the Baptist teaching of Memorialism are attempts to sidestep the Mystery, the first by trying to pin it down, the second by dismissing it altogether.

Speaking of doctrine, it's ironic that this Sacrament of love and reconciliation should have become a source of much bitter antagonism among Christian groups, a source of discord rather than of unity. Rather than gathering in faith around the table and letting the Lord decide what is actually going on, we insist on our own interpretations and deny others who profess to follow Christ, participation at our table – or have so down through the ages. Today, most Anglicans practice an 'open table,' the only requirement being Baptism in the name of the Holy Trinity, which is, I believe, as it should be: it is only by coming together to share in Christ that we can overcome the divisions that so cripple our common mission.

SAINTS:

John & Charles Wesley.

24 May. Pastors.

Born at Epworth Rectory in Lincolnshire, John Wesley was the son of an Anglican clergyman and a Puritan mother. He entered Holy Orders and, following a religious experience on this day in 1738, began an itinerant ministry which recognised no parish boundaries. This resulted, after his death, in the development of a world-wide Methodist Church. His spirituality involved an Arminian affirmation of grace, frequent communion and a disciplined corporate search for holiness. His open-air preaching, concern for education and for the poor, liturgical revision, organisation of local societies and training of preachers provided a firm basis for Christian growth and mission in England.

Charles shared with his brother John the building up of early Methodist societies, as they travelled the country. His special concern was that early Methodists should remain loyal to Anglicanism. He married and settled in Bristol, later in London, concentrating his work on the local Christian communities. His thousands of hymns established a resource of lyrical piety which has enabled generations of Christians to re-discover the refining power of God's love. They celebrate God's work of grace from birth to death, the great events of God's work of salvation and the rich themes of eucharistic worship, anticipating the taking up of humanity into the divine life.

John died in 1791 and Charles in 1788.

Augustine, Archbishop of Canterbury.

26 May. Missionary.

Augustine was prior of the monastery of St Andrew in Rome. In 596, at the instigation of Pope Gregory the Great, he was dispatched as the leader of a group of forty monks to re-evangelise the English Church. Augustine appears not to have been a particularly confident person, and in Gaul he wanted to turn back, but Pope Gregory's firm resolution held the group to their mission. The monks finally landed in Kent in the summer of 597 where they were well received by King Ethelbert whose wife, Bertha, was a Christian. Once established, Augustine returned temporarily to Gaul to receive ordination as a bishop. Pope Gregory would have preferred London to have become the primatial see, but in the event Canterbury was chosen, and thus Augustine became the first archbishop of Canterbury. He died in either 604 or 605.