

**O COME, LET US WORSHIP XVII:  
“WE ARE BOLD TO SAY”**

Our reflections on the Mass brought us last week to the conclusion of the Prayer of Consecration. In the latter part of that prayer we say, “And although we are unworthy, through our manifold sins, to offer unto thee any sacrifice; yet we beseech thee to accept this our bounden duty and service; not weighing our merits, but pardoning our offences, through Jesus Christ our Lord.” In summing up the matter and bringing it to a conclusion, I said, “Our unworthy and imperfect sacrifice of ourselves is united in this sacrament with the most worthy and perfect sacrifice of Christ, and God receives it, not because of us but because of him, because of him ‘by whom, and with whom, in the unity of the Holy Ghost, all honour and glory’ is due unto God, the Father Almighty, world without end. Amen.”

It seemed appropriate to end the sermon thus, simply citing the final doxology which ascribes thanks and glory to God for the great gift of his Son that is the center and focus of the Prayer of Consecration. In the liturgy, however, that words are not simply cited but are accompanied by a rather elaborate ritual, and are often sung. These indeed were the words in the old liturgy that were said or sung aloud after the priest had prayed the long Prayer of Consecration silently, and on hearing the words the whole congregation would respond, “Amen.” After the mention of Jesus Christ the priest would say, “*Per ipsum et cum ipso et in ipso*,” “Through him and with him and in him,” and at each of these three reference to Christ the sign of the cross would be made over the chalice, as we do, but now, unlike the many signs of the cross made earlier over the altar, this one is made, not with the hand of the priest alone, but with the host, that is with the sacred body of Christ (Gih). Following these three small crosses made over the chalice there are two more larger signs of the cross, visible to the congregation, made not over the chalice but between the chalice, which has now been lifted in the priest’s left hand, between the chalice and his breast. The first three smaller crosses over the chalice were made in honor of Christ ‘through whom with whom and in whom’ is our redemption, and the final two larger crosses are in honor of the Holy Ghost and God the Father, “ever one

God world without end.” These latter crosses are made, as I said, not over the chalice but before it, because it is only God the Son that was incarnate and immolated for our sins. The total number of crosses is thus five, as are those with which our altar is engraved and the fair linen which lies upon it is embossed, signifying, of course, the five wounds of Christ. And as the priest chants, “world without end,” the congregation responds to this profound ascription of glory, this fitting concluding ritual to the prayer which consecrates Christ’s offering and ours, with a solemn affirming, “Amen.”

Following this glorious doxology, we proceed without break to the first of the communion prayers, which is, of course, the one taught us by our Lord. It seems, as some would suggest, that even at the time of the Apostles, when there was not yet a developed Eucharistic liturgy, the reading of our Lord’s words of Institution, as given us for instance by St. Paul in I Corinthians 11, would be followed simply by our Lord’s Prayer. It is he who gave us both and it is only by his authority that we do these things and make this prayer. That is why in the ancient words by which the prayer is introduced we say, “And now, as our Saviour Christ hath taught us, we are bold to say.” How could we be so bold as to approach the thrice-holy God, the mighty creator of heaven and earth, and say, “Our Father,” unless he who was his truest Son so taught us and by his intercession opened up the door to the Father, was himself the Door.

“Our Father,” we pray, and proceed with a prayer that looks back on the prayers that have already been said and forward to the communion that is yet to follow. The first petition, “Hallowed be thy name,” seems to hearken back to the three-fold *Sanctus*: “Holy, holy, holy.” “Thy kingdom come,” seems a repetition of the essence of the Invocation or Epiclesis, a call for the working of God’s Word and Holy Spirit, and “Thy will be done,” an evocation of the exact words of our Lord as he contemplated the cruciform ordeal that lay before him. Joseph Jungmann said, “The spirit and disposition with which our Lord Himself had offered up his sacrifice and which we must draw from our co-performance of it, could hardly have been expressed more cogently.” “Hallowed be thy name, thy kingdom come, thy will be done.” With the fourth petition we expressly ask for our daily bread, for ideally it is daily communion that we desire. The Body and Blood of Christ is our manna in the wilderness, that which will sustain us on our earthly journey until we feast with him at the heavenly banquet. And it looks forward to and

yearns for that consummation of all things when we will be with him in glory, for literally it is ‘the bread for the morrow’ for which we pray. “The bread of the morrow, give us this day.” The prayer proceeds next to ask for the forgiveness of our sins, without which we cannot receive the blessed communion, and links that forgiveness we seek with the forgiveness which we must extend, if we are to receive it. “Forgive us as we forgive.” We pray then for endurance of temptation and deliverance from evil, for we cannot tread the path to everlasting life without the earnest pursuit of holiness and righteousness, nor achieve them without his ever present help, deliverance and empowerment., for it is *a fight* that we must fight and *a race* that we must run. These things we ask for, as he said we should, and these we shall surely receive if we truly seek them.

The priest begins the Lord’s Prayer and then says the remainder silently while the people continue. And then he, completing the prayer up to “deliver us from evil” before the people finish, proceeds silently, praying, “Deliver us, we beseech thee, from all evils, past present and to come; and at the intercessions of the blessed and glorious Ever-Virgin Mary, the Mother of God, with thy blessed Apostles Peter and Paul, and with Andrew and all thy saints, give peace graciously in our days. . . .” In this prayer for deliverance and peace we invoke the prayers also of Blessed St. Mary and the Apostles, that great cloud of witnesses in the Church triumphant who have trod this way before us and who earnestly seek that we may successfully follow. We are not alone. Then the prayer continues, “That we being holpen [that is, helped] by the succour of thy mercy, may both always be free from sin and safe from all disquietude.” As the priest says these last words he takes the paten, the little saucer on which the host, the body of Christ, is to be laid, and kisses it, honoring Christ, who is the author and finisher of our faith, who is the champion on whom our eyes are fixed as we run this race. Note that nowhere in the liturgy does the priest kiss the host. He kisses the altar on which our Lord’s sacrifice is re-enacted and he kisses the paten on which his body is laid, but reverence forbids that he actually kisses the host.

As the priest concludes this silent prayer and says, “through Jesus Christ our Lord,” he holds the host over the chalice and breaks it. Thus does he enact the third of the four actions of our Lord at the Last Supper as set forth in the Gospels: “He *took*

bread, *blessed* it, and *broke* it, and *gave* it to them.” Even so did the priest *take* the bread as he prepared the elements, *blessed* it in the Prayer of Consecration, and now *breaks* it. This is called the ‘Fracture’, for our Lord’s body was literally fractured, broken upon the cross, even as he literally broke the bread at the Supper. It is broken over the chalice because it is from the broken body that the blood flowed. As Nicholas Gihhr put it, “The fraction of the Eucharistic Bread over the chalice is intended to indicate that the Blood contained in the chalice proceeds from the broken, that is from the wounded and mangled Body of Christ, and, therefore, belongs to it and is one with it, and with its content constitutes but one Sacrifice and one Sacrificial Gift.” The prayer uttered softly by the priest at the altar ends with his chanting aloud, “World without end” and the people’s response, “Amen.”

Then there is the peace: “The peace of the Lord be alway with you. And with thy spirit.” “Peace be with you.” With these words did our Lord greet his fearful disciples after his resurrection. That peace for which the world longed in its alienation from God and amid the discord that infuses all human relationships, that peace that was announced by angels to shepherds on the night of his birth, that true peace that could only come through his dying for our sins and his rising victorious over death and hell, that peace is ours through the sacrifice memorialized in this sacrament. Peace, true inner peace and the promise of peace on earth is the legacy of his death, resurrection and ascension, and into that legacy we enter ever more fully every time we celebrate Holy Communion. That peace is with God and man, and especially with those of the household of faith. From apostolic times this has been symbolized with a greeting, the kiss of peace. In some churches, regrettably, this degenerates into a general round of glad-handing and ‘Good Mornings,’ but it is a true sign of the communion our Lord came to establish when we greet one another as the Risen Lord greeted his disciples, “Peace be with you.” And without truly being at peace with our brothers and sisters in Christ, we cannot truly receive him.

The last action we would consider this morning is that wherein the priest, who as he said, “The peace of the Lord be alway with you,” was making three signs of the cross over the chalice with a small piece of the host which he had broken from one of the halves after the Fracture, now drops that small piece into the chalice, thus commingling

the body and blood. Christ's body and blood having been to this point separated on the altar are now united. It must never be forgotten that the separating of body and blood clearly signifies death. Jesus' disciples gathered in the upper room on that last night, and having witnessed the slaying of the Passover lambs that very day and repeatedly throughout their lives could never for a moment have misunderstood the significance when separately with reference to the bread and the wine the Lord said, "This is my body" and "This is my blood." The commingling, the re-uniting, of the body and blood, may point to their being together again in the risen body of our Lord., for it is the risen Lord that we receive. It also suggests the oneness of the body and blood, so that, as Holy Church teaches, he who receives but one element, either the bread or the wine, does not receive only the body or only blood of Christ, but the whole Christ. With this action the priest prays, "May this mingling of the Body and Blood of Jesus Christ be unto us who receive it an approach to everlasting life, Amen." So may it be indeed for all of us.

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Sermon preached by the Rev'd Fr. Voris G. Brookshire on the Fifth Sunday of Lent, March 29, 2009, at the Anglican Catholic Church of Saint John the Theologian, Pompano Beach, FL. Copyright © 2009.