

The Eleventh Sunday of Pentecost

August 20, 2006

Proverbs 9:1-6

Psalm 147 or 34:9-14

Ephesians 5:15-20

John 6:53-59

In the name of God, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

What are we doing here? Sounds like a strange question, doesn't it? But every once in a while, it might be a good idea to pause and think about that.

The significant word is "doing." We are a Sacramental Church, a church that is held together with what we do as a body. Our life as a church revolves around the sacraments – things we can see and do that are signs of a very special relationship to God, signs of God's presence here in our lives. We uphold the importance of scripture – we read lots and lots of scripture. We confess our belief in God and Jesus and the Holy Spirit in our ancient creeds, but the things that unite us are the sacraments. We are engaged in one right now – the sacrament of Holy Communion – a great sacrament that Our Lord Himself ordained.

We are about to receive bread and wine, such common things. Jesus and His faithful disciples had bread and wine at every meal. And then, there was one very special meal, a last meal, when Jesus took those common things and transformed them, and said, "This bread is my body; this wine is my blood" – transforms them forever in our Christian faith. Is that something to be analyzed and made literal? Of course

not. We don't have the words to describe what that means. We have instead the experience of that presence.

Jesus told those befuddled disciples, and He tells us, that whoever eats my flesh, my body, this bread, and drinks that blood, this wine, "abides in me and I in him."

Abides: it means that they, and you and I, are one with Our Lord. It means exactly that. It means that through the sacraments, we have gained life – eternal life – in Our Lord, Jesus Christ.

It's not a simple idea, is it? It's a hard saying to understand. No doubt His disciples and all who heard it were utterly confused, perhaps scandalized. Body and blood! Some are still scandalized. There are those today who cannot see what Our Lord meant.

In the first half of the twentieth century, the church was graced by the guidance of the Archbishop of Canterbury, William Temple. His term was tragically short, but he was, arguably, the brightest of all in the church. He wrote many books, one of which was his commentary on St. John's Gospel, this morning's Gospel. It is still one of the definitive works about John.

How would Temple answer the question, "What are we doing here?" Temple would tell us that we become complete when we receive the sacrament, the body and the blood. In the flesh, the body, the bread, we are one with His sacrifice – His body given for us on the cross. In the blood we receive the sacred essence of life itself – the life of Our Lord poured out for us.

In receiving both we come to full communion with Him.

In the collect for funerals we make the confession that in death "life is changed, not ended." Jesus, in His death for us, and in His resurrection to glory, changed the life of the world, your life and mine. He opened for us eternal life.

Our response to that great and joyful gift is the answer to what you and I are doing here.

In His Holy Name.