

Maundy Thursday 2009 1662 Holy Communion

Maundy Thursday is the day on which Jesus gave His disciples the new commandment (*novum mandatum*) that we should love one another as He has loved us. It is also the day on which He shared His Last Supper with His disciples, the perfect Passover; consecrated Himself as priest and sacrifice and consecrated His Church to complete His mission to the world. It is the night on which He went out into the Garden of Gethsemane to face the ordeal awaiting Him on Good Friday. It is the night on which He gave His Church the gift of Holy Communion, a perpetual proclamation of His precious Death until His coming again and a participation in His Blood and His Body. St Paul's word is *κοινωνία*. You may translate *κοινωνία* as *communion* or *fellowship*. This Sacrament is our fellowship meal, our communion with one another and with our Saviour, the unseen guest and host. This year, for various reasons, I decided that we should celebrate our Maundy Thursday Communion at St Michael's using the 1662 rite. It won't seem quite like the 1662 many of us grew up with. What we are used to is 1662 celebrated as it evolved over 300 years. What I am trying to do tonight is to celebrate Holy Communion in the way that the English Reformers envisaged. What were their insights into the meaning of this most holy service and what have we as C21 Anglicans inherited from them? During the reign of King Henry VIII, there was a strong body of opinion in England that the Church in this country ought to be reformed according to the principles then being promulgated by Martin Luther in Germany – justification by faith, the Bible and Prayer Book in the national language, the priesthood of all believers, and so on and so forth. One of the leaders of this English Protestant movement was Thomas Cranmer, Henry's Archbishop of Canterbury, whose martyrdom we commemorate on 21st March. Henry blew hot and cold on the reformation of the English Church and it was not until Henry's son Edward VI succeeded to the throne that Cranmer was able to introduce Holy Communion in English. There were two versions in Edward's reign – 1549 and 1552. 1552 was much more protestant than 1549 and obviously some people preferred the one to the other. After Edward's premature death, Queen Mary Tudor suppressed the English prayer book and reintroduced the Latin Mass. On her accession, Queen Elizabeth I wisely attempted to find a Reformation solution in which people of diverse integrities could unite in a single national Church. Prayer books issued in Elizabeth's reign compromise, with features from both 1549 and 1552. Fifty years after her death, following the English Civil War, the prayer book was suppressed under Oliver Cromwell's Protectorate. The book we are using tonight was authorised in 1662 as a result of the Restoration of King Charles II, and, for the next 300 years or so, was substantially the only form of service which could legally be used in the Church of England. 1662 is effectively the prayer book of Elizabeth I slightly updated and it is therefore still largely the achievement of Thomas Cranmer. Much of Cranmer's work has also, of course, been incorporated into the *Common Worship* form of the service which we now mainly use.

The first thing perhaps you noticed was that the table has been brought down into the body of the church and turned around so that the length runs east/west, rather than north/south. The reason for this is that, during the Middle Ages, the Holy Communion had increasingly come to be regarded as a sacrifice offered by the priest on behalf of the people. The table was regarded as an altar – i.e. a place on which sacrifice was offered – and placed against the east wall of the sanctuary. The priest offered the sacrifice with his back to the people and

separated from them by the length of the chancel and, very often, by a rood screen at the chancel arch. He spoke quietly in a voice they could hardly hear and in Latin, a language most of them could not understand. Lay people did not normally receive Communion very often and, when they did, they only received the consecrated bread, not the wine. What Cranmer was trying to do was to restore the sense of Holy Communion as a fellowship meal. For the protestant reformers, the Eucharist is not in itself a sacrifice. There are three aspects of sacrifice in the protestant Communion service, but it is not a sacrifice in itself. First and foremost, participation in Holy Communion remembers and proclaims the Death of Christ on the Cross. This is *a full, perfect, and sufficient, sacrifice, oblation, and satisfaction, for the sins of the whole world*. It does not require to be and cannot be repeated or supplemented. The Crucifixion of Jesus is everything we need in order that we may be reconciled to God. At Calvary, Christ effected atonement. There is nothing more that anyone needs to do, but to accept what Jesus has done for him. In response to what Christ has accomplished for us, our corporate celebration of Holy Communion is appropriately described as *our sacrifice of praise and thanksgiving*. It is something which we ask God to accept from us because of his *fatherly goodness*. It is a wonderful privilege that God accepts from us *our sacrifice of praise and thanksgiving*. Caught up in this joyous participation in the Body and Blood of Christ, there is one further sacrifice: *And here we offer and present unto thee, O Lord, ourselves, our souls and bodies, to be a reasonable, holy, and lively sacrifice unto thee*. As we remember Christ's offering of Himself for us on the cross, we offer Him back our own lives as a living sacrifice. It is important that we all understand what we are doing insofar as any human being can approach comprehension of the mysteries of God. So the service is in English. All Christians are priests. So all the confirmed communicate every day on which they attend a communion service, not just the minister. The minister may not celebrate Communion on his own before God. We all receive both the bread and the wine, just as Jesus told us to. Holy Communion is basically a meal, a supper.

But, for the reformers, as for the Church in general, Holy Communion is no ordinary meal. The bread and wine are received kneeling, *which order*, to quote the so-called black rubric, *is well meant, for a signification of our humble and grateful acknowledgement of the benefits of receiving Christ therein given to all worthy Receivers*. After the service any consecrated bread or wine remaining must be consumed by the priest with, if he so appoints, the assistance of other communicants. What is more, the 1662 prayer book treats with great importance the frame of mind in which worshippers approach the Lord's Table. One thing from the 1662 service I have omitted tonight is to require you all to state in advance, by yesterday in fact, your intention to receive Communion at this service. I should look at the list of intending communicants and repel from the Lord's Table any *notorious evil liver*, any who have sinned against their neighbours and refused to repent and make restitution and any members of the congregation *betwixt whom I perceive malice and hatred to reign*. We have dropped the requirement for the rector to examine people presenting themselves to receive Communion, but is this because we now trust one another not to come unless we repent of our sins and are in love and charity with our neighbours? Or is it that we feel that it no longer really matters in what frame of mind people come to communion with Jesus Christ and His Church?

I do intend to read Cranmer's exhortation to those who intend to come to Communion, although it is usually left out in modern 1662 celebrations. To most of it I can say a hearty *Amen*, but I am not comfortable about the words *so is the danger great, if we receive the same unworthily, For then we are guilty of the Body and Blood of Christ our Saviour; we eat and drink our own damnation, not considering the Lord's Body; we kindle God's wrath against us; we provoke him to plague us with divers diseases and sundry kinds of death.* In the past, people believed that God took an intimate interest in their lives. What happened to them in this life and the next was according to the Will of God. The way God's Will works out for our lives would depend on how we respond to the love of God. God loves us and, if we live in accordance with His Law of Love, everything goes well in this world and the next. If we rebel against His holy love, our sinful selves are consumed by that very holiness. Do we still believe this or do we believe that Christians in the past got it wholly wrong? If we do not believe that unworthy participation in holy things provokes God's wrath, are we saying that God doesn't care whether or not we honour Him and other people? Or are we saying that God does care if we fail to love Him with all our heart, soul, mind and strength and our neighbour as ourselves, but that it won't make any difference if we don't? Do we believe that God won't take action against those who reject Him and defy His commandment that we should love one another? Is divine judgment a reality? Does it make any difference to us what we believe or how we behave, either in this world or the next?

The protestant reformers were very concerned about sin and its effects. Sin divides human beings from God Whom to know is eternal life. *The wages, therefore, of sin is death.* The only remedy for sin is the sacrificial death of Jesus. The only way to receive the benefits of His self-sacrifice (the forgiveness of sin) is to repent and believe. This is the ethos which undergirds the 1662 Communion service. This service is perhaps fairly criticised for an overemphasis on sin and the cross as its only remedy. 1662 Communion has (probably) too little praise, too little celebration of God's goodness in creation and the joyful Resurrection of Jesus from the dead. I wouldn't recommend 1662 for every Sunday in a C21 English church. I do think, however, that we C21 English Christians probably don't take seriously enough God's intimate, loving involvement with our every day lives. We are not sufficiently conscious of the difference God makes: of what it really means to love God with all our hearts, minds, souls and strength and our neighbours as ourselves; of what a church ought to be; of what is truly required of us as Christians; of what Jesus has done for us on the Cross. The insights of the English reformers are a rich part of our Christian heritage in this country and it is right, from time, to remind ourselves of what they understood and to revue what we now believe in the light of the insights they were given. Cranmer's vision is that in Holy Communion we are fed *with the spiritual food of the most precious Body and blood of thy Son our Saviour Jesus Christ: We are assured thereby of thy favour and goodness towards us; and that we are very members incorporate in the mystical body of thy Son, which is the blessed company of all faithful people; and are also heirs through hope of thy everlasting kingdom, by the merits of the most precious death and passion of thy dear Son.* If this is the faith you and I share with Thomas Cranmer, we surely join with him in praying to God *so to assist us with thy grace, that we may continue in that holy fellowship, and do all such good works as thou hast prepared for us to walk in.* If this is our sincere prayer, I see no reason why anything should be impossible to us.