

Sermon Subject; THE LORD'S SUPPER

SCRIPTURE: Thy vows shall be offered up in righteousness on all days, and at all times; but remember that on this, the Lord's day, thou shalt offer thine oblations and thy sacraments unto the Most High, confessing thy sins unto thy brethren, and before the Lord.

On the night of his betrayal, when Jesus knew that he soon was to leave the disciples, he gathered with them in an upper room to eat the feast of the Passover according to the Jewish custom. After they had eaten the Passover meal, Jesus took bread and wine, and blessed it; and passing it among the eleven disciples (for Judas had left) instituted the ordinance which has been the distinctive mark of all Christian worship ever since.

There are four principal concepts of the communion among Christian people. The Roman Catholic regards the mass, in which the bread and wine are consecrated, as a recurring and perpetual sacrifice for the sins of believers. He also believes that the act of consecration causes the bread and wine to become the actual physical body and blood of Christ; that Christ is physically present in the mass through the bread and wine. This is the doctrine of transubstantiation. Martin Luther denied transubstantiation, and substituted a doctrine of con-substantiation, a belief that the body and blood of Christ existed in and with the bread and wine, without changing their outward form, as heat may exist in a piece of iron without changing the iron. Zwingli, another reformer, taught that the bread and wine are only symbols; and he rejected all the sacramental aspects of the communion. John Calvin had still a fourth theory, that the bread and wine are only symbols, but that the Lord's Supper is a sacrament by which the atonement of Christ is sealed to the communicant in a covenant relationship.

The Latter Day Saint belief most nearly resembles the fourth of these concepts -- that the bread and wine are merely symbols; that there is no physical presence of Christ in those symbols; that the partaking of this sacrament is a memorial of Christ; and last but not least, that it is a memorial of the covenant the believer has made with Christ through the ordinances of baptism and the laying on of hands. The keynote or key word of the whole ordinance to us is remembrance -- remembrance of the sacrifice, the suffering, the broken body and spilled blood of our Lord, and remembrance of the covenant we have made with him to keep his commandments, a remembrance that we have taken his name upon us and been adopted into his family.

Remembrance is the key word in Paul's teaching about the communion in the eleventh chapter of First Corinthians, where Jesus is quoted twice as saying, "This do in remembrance of me." It is the key word in Luke's account of the last supper, where we find the same words: "This do in remembrance of me." The Book of Mormon records that when Jesus came to America to minister to the people of this continent following his resurrection, he gave them the same instruction when instituting this ordinance and sacrament among them -- that it should be done in remembrance of him. And again in modern revelation, the command was given through Joseph Smith that the church should "meet together often to partake of the bread and wine in remembrance of the Lord Jesus." The idea of remembrance is further emphasized in the prayer of blessing which is asked over the bread and wine before the people partake, in which God is asked to bless the bread (or wine) to the souls of those who partake of it, that they may eat in remembrance of the body (or blood) of Christ.

For Latter Day Saints, then, there is neither transubstantiation nor consubstantiation; the bread and wine are merely emblems, symbols of the body and blood of Christ; they are blessed to the souls, not the bodies, of those who partake; and they are taken in remembrance of him, his death and resurrection, and of the covenant we have made with him in baptism.

What, then, are we to do with Jesus' statements, "This is my body," and "this is my blood?" As recorded by Matthew, Mark, and Luke? The commentary in the Interpreter's Bible (Mark 14:22) says of these phrases, "In Aramic (i.e. the language in which Jesus spoke) there would be no verb; much of the later ecclesiastical controversy over the Eucharist would have been obviated if Aramic had continued the language of the gospel." But the gospels were written in Greek, not Aramic, and the Greek verb "is" was supplied. Ever since, theologians have been debating as to what Jesus meant -- whether he meant "This is my body," or "This means, or signifies, or typifies my body." It was a mealtime custom among the Jews for the head of the house to break the bread as he gave thanks. Could it not be that as Jesus broke the bread, he was telling the disciples in symbols that this was what would happen to his body, and emphasizing it with the symbolic world, "This is my body?"

The sixth chapter of John's gospel contains this further language of Jesus: "Verily, verily, I say unto you, Except ye eat the flesh of the Son of man, and drink his blood, ye have no life in you. Whoso eateth my flesh, and drinketh my blood, hath eternal life; and I will raise him up at the last day." He also characterized himself as the "bread of life," the "living bread that came down from heaven."

When Jesus said, "This is my body," did he mean to have those words taken literally? He also said, "I am the door," but by that he did not mean that he was a slab of wood closing an opening in the wall. He is called "The Good Shepherd," "the bridegroom," "the vine," "the corner stone," and many other appellations which are rich in symbolism, but which lose their significance immediately if one attempts to make too literal an interpretation of them. Let us remember as we consider this problem that Jesus' body was not sent down from heaven; it was born of a woman, and was of the earth, the same as yours or mine. So also was the blood in that body. Eating that physical body or drinking that physical blood would be a repulsive abomination to all civilized peoples, and especially to a Jew -- and Jesus was a Jew. It is simply inconceivable that Jesus was speaking literally.

Verse 56 of the 6th chapter of John says, "He that eateth my flesh, and drinketh my blood, dwelleth in me, and I in him. As the living Father hath sent me, and I live by the Father, so he that eateth me, even he shall live by me." As the flesh in every organ of the body metaphorically feeds on, and at the time assists in feeding every other organ of the body, so the member of Christ's body is fed by that body, if he abides in the body, As the entire human body is fed, nourished, strengthened, and revitalized by its blood, so we, if we remain or abide in Christ and in his body, will in that relationship be nourished by the life-blood which flows through that body. "He that eateth my flesh and drinketh my blood, dwelleth in me, and I in him."

The "bread of life" which came down from heaven was not Jesus' body, but his Spirit. The Spirit is the real personality; it is he himself, his life, his nature. "It is the Spirit which quickeneth; the flesh profiteth nothing; the words that I speak unto you, they are spirit, and they are life." When men are born again of water and of the Spirit, when they have become an integral, functioning part of Christ's body, then they begin to partake of this spiritual food, this new life which is in the body. The merit, then, is not in the physical

substance of the bread and wine, whether it be bread and wine, or flesh and blood, but rather in the spiritual communion established through them with the body of Christ, as the partakers of the communion memorialize again and bear witness to their new birth and their covenant to serve and obey Christ and to abide in him.

Who should receive the communion? We do not give physical food to those who are physically dead; neither do we give spiritual food to those who are still spiritually dead in trespasses and sins. The vine cannot feed the branch that is not functionally attached to the vine and its life. The body cannot feed with its lifeblood the member which is outside it. Neither can the body of Christ feed the man who does not discern that body to the point where he will yield himself to it and unite himself functionally with it, giving up his own life and nature, and partaking of the life of the body. Latter Day Saints therefore believe in close communion. We give communion only to those who are alive in Christ -- to those who with us have made a binding, authoritative covenant with him.

We believe that the communion is a sacrament, a solemn memorial of a sacred and binding covenant which has been administered by one having authority to commit God; and because it is a sacrament, the communion itself must be administered by one having priesthood authority in the church. Consequently, although we have the most friendly feeling for people of other denominations, we do not take communion with them because we do not recognize their authority to administer it. Although any person, regardless of religious belief, is welcome to worship with us at any of our meetings, including the communion service, we do not invite those not members of our church to partake with us, because the ordinances of baptism and laying on of hands, authoritatively administered by his priesthood, would be to eat and drink unworthily, not discerning the Lord's body.

Another keynote of the communion is unity. There must be unity of faith, unity in the covenant relationship with Christ, unity with each other. Anything which separates any member from any other member, or any of us from Christ, is a hindrance to the proper partaking of the communion meal. Those who approach the altar of God must be sure that they have nothing against any brother, and that no brother has aught against them. There must be true repentance for sin, and restitution where wrong has been done, or there can be no peace and union between member and member, or between member and Christ. It is significant that at the first communion, Judas did not partake; he was guilty and unworthy.

In Book of Mormon times when Christ instituted the communion in his church in America, he commanded: "Ye shall not suffer any one knowingly to partake of my flesh and blood unworthily..." This agrees with Paul's warning to the Corinthians, that "whosoever shall eat of this bread and drink of this cup unworthily, shall be guilty of the body and blood of the Lord." The unworthy member is not to be cast out of the meeting, or out of the fellowship of the church, but is to be ministered to and prayed for until he repents and makes reconciliation, and is again worthy to receive communion.

When members of the church of Christ partake of the communion worthily, having repented of their sins and made restitution, they find forgiveness for their sins -- not necessarily because of the act of communion, but because true repentance always brings forgiveness. The occasion of the communion calls for self-examination and an end to temporizing about repentance, and true repentance always brings forgiveness.

Latter Day Saints believe that the materials of the communion meal are not of primary importance. We customarily use bread of our own make, and we are commanded to use pure wine of the grape, of our own make, thus assuring its freedom from adulteration or fermentation. In cases of necessity, it is permissible to use pure water instead of wine.

The question of how often to partake of the communion is another one which has given rise to endless argument. Historically, the early church celebrated the communion meal every time they met together -- night or day, but usually on the Lord's day -- the first day of the week. The first communion was served by our Lord at the close of a common meal, very late at night. There is no command that I know of in the New Testament specifying the exact time when this ordinance should be observed, or how frequently. Latter Day Saints have been commanded in modern revelation to "meet together often," but we have also been told that the time or the frequency do not matter if the ordinance is observed in remembrance of the Lord, and in willingness to take his name upon us. It is customary among our people to serve communion on the first Sunday morning of each month, although it may also be served on other special occasions when wisdom or expediency warrant.

The communion is a memorial meal, observed in remembrance of the sacrifice of our Lord for us, in remembrance of his body and blood, in remembrance of the covenant which we have made with him, in remembrance of the unity which exists between the members of Christ's church, and the unity we have with him. Through this ordinance we eat of the bread of heaven -- which is the Spirit, the personality of Christ, drawing our nourishment from his body as we abide in him, and function with him and he through us, to accomplish the tasks and the purposes of his kingdom.