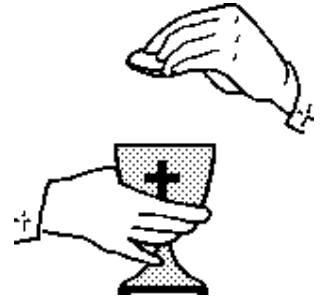

Yes, Lord ✠ I believe:

The bread of heaven, the cup of salvation

On the night before he died for us, our Lord Jesus Christ took bread; and when he had given thanks to you, he broke it, and gave it to his disciples, and said, "Take, eat: This is my Body, which is given for you. Do this for the remembrance of me."

After supper he took the cup of wine; and when he had given thanks, he gave it to them, and said, "Drink this, all of you: This is my Blood of the new Covenant, which is shed for you and for many for the forgiveness of sins. Whenever you drink it, do this for the remembrance of me."

The Book of Common Prayer, page 368



BY CHERYLE J. CERZO
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The words of the Prayer of Consecration are among the most familiar in the prayer book. Each time we make Eucharist, we hear these words or some variation of them. Perhaps, then, we come to be comforted by the *sound* rather than the content of this prayer.

I like to think on these words from time to time, to take the familiar phrases apart and listen — *really* listen — to what is being said.

"On the night before He died for us ..." How often do we think how long that night was, especially for the One Who knew what terrors it would hold? Over the past several years it has been my practice to rise at 3am on Good Friday and drive to my parish church to spend a half-hour in prayer before the Altar of Repose.

One recent year, I arrived back home about 4:30am, crawled sleepily back into my bed, and was startled into wakefulness by the thought, "Jesus didn't have this luxury. As you lie here comfortable, safely surrounded by four walls and people whom you love, remember Jesus; His night has barely begun."

To be honest, although the thought was disturbing, it didn't keep me awake more than a few minutes. However, when I rose a few hours later, at 7:30, the thought returned: "His night continues."

The hours that I had spent with my family, at prayer, in bed sleeping, had covered the same amount of time that Jesus had spent that night in mental and physical anguish, deprived of the consolation of friends and the comfort of sleep. And still He faced hours of degradation and ridicule. While His crucifixion must have loomed before

Him as more intense torture, there must also have been some comfort in knowing that at least it would soon be over.

"... our Lord Jesus Christ took bread; and when He had given thanks, He broke it ..." This same Little Lord Jesus about Whom we sang so few months ago is now Lord Jesus, the Christ, the Anointed. He has given us lessons about bread: "Man does not live by bread alone," "I am the Bread of Life," "Give us this day our daily bread."

And now He takes the bread, and He gives thanks to His Father. He surely thanks Him not only for the bread that is food for physical need, but for the Bread that is His Body, and He breaks it even as His Body will be broken before the setting of another sun.

"... and He gave it to his disciples, and said, 'Take, eat: This is My Body, which is given for you.'" How often do we remember that around that table sat Peter, who would deny Him; James and John, who had vied for position at His right hand; Thomas, who would doubt the reality of Jesus' Resurrection; and Judas — let us not forget Judas — who would betray Him.

He did not exclude *anyone* from the gift of His broken body; He offered Himself to each of them.

"After supper He took the cup of wine ..." This cup which we take to our lips each time we take part in the Eucharist recalls to us not only the Blood of our Lord, but the sour wine — vinegar — that was given to Him as He hung on the Cross, as well as the wine of celebration, the wine He changed from water at the wedding in Cana. It is a feast, a celebratory drinking of wine, a symbol of our salvation.

"... and when He had given thanks, He gave it to them, and said, 'Drink

this all of you ...'" Again, He thanked His Father for the fruit of man's labor and for the blood that He would shed; and again He not only offered Himself, there was an insistence: "Drink this *all* of you."

Perhaps His emphasis was necessary. Judas had already put into motion the wheels of betrayal; Jesus was speaking to him, as well, just as He speaks to us: "You are not beyond the redemptive power of My Blood." Do we hear Him when He says that to us? Do we *believe* Him?

"This is My Blood of the new Covenant, which is shed for you and for many for the forgiveness of sins." He who was without sin poured out His blood for sinners. His sacrifice of blood replaces forever the blood offerings made over the centuries spanned by the Old Testament.

This is a *New* Covenant, a new bridge to God, made by the only One who could make it: God Himself. If He made the bridge, how can we deny ourselves passage across it? Is it not offered to *all*?

"... Do this for the remembrance of Me." Not pictures in a book, not a reliving of an event, but an ongoing *re-calling* of His offering of His Body for us. All over this Earth, every day, at every hour, this eucharistic event is celebrated.

His sacrifice was made for each of us. We can take part or not; it is our choice. But the offer is there. Listen to His words. Take them into your heart and spirit. Take His sacrifice unto yourself and into your body. That which we consume becomes a part of our physical selves, as well. We are filled with Jesus. **AMEN.**

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