

“Things to Remember”
a “Good Friday” Holy Supper Address

By Rev. Michael Gladish
Mitchellville, MD, April 19th, 2019

One of the critical features of the Lord’s Last Passover Supper was what we might call the implantation of remains, or to put it in simpler terms, the establishment of powerful memories that the disciples could call on in the days following His death and resurrection.

As He said on the night of that supper, after He had washed the disciples feet and was about to predict His betrayal by Judas, “Now I tell you [this] before it comes, that when it does come to pass, you may believe that I AM” (John 13:19). It’s tempting to think this means “that you may believe *who* I am,” but the translation is correct, and clearly refers back to the incident at the burning bush where God told Moses to inform the people that His name was “I am I who AM,” and also to the Lord’s own words a few chapters earlier in John where, in an argument with the Jews He plainly said, “Most assuredly... before Abraham was, I AM,” at which they took up stones to throw at Him for blasphemy.

The point is that all throughout His ministry, and especially in this last week, the Lord was filling the disciples’ minds with images and information that would be stored away in their collective memories so that LATER, when they reflected back on it, they could understand what they were not *able* to understand at the time. This is in keeping with one of the great laws of the Divine Providence, which says that a person is led and taught by the Lord, not directly by miracles and signs or by the power of persuasion, but “*indirectly* by means of the Word, preaching, reading, conversation and communication with others, *and thus by thoughts within oneself about these things*” (AE 1173:2, see also DP 154).

As this is a universal law for the protection and preservation of human free will, it applies as surely to the Lord’s personal ministry among the disciples as it does to His work with us now. So as you know, even the disciples, who had spent **three years** with the Lord, personally witnessing miracle after miracle and marveling at His wisdom, still in this last week doubted Him and failed to appreciate His power. Why?! We read,

“It is according to the laws of order that no one ought to be persuaded about truth in a moment, that is to say, that truth should be so confirmed in a moment as to leave no doubt whatever about it; because the truth which is so impressed becomes persuasive truth, and is devoid of any extension, and also of any yielding quality. Such truth is represented in the other life as hard, and as such that it does not admit good into it so as to become applicable. Hence it is that as soon as *in the other life* any truth is presented before good spirits by a manifest experience, there is soon afterward presented something opposite which causes doubt. In this way it is given them to **think about it**, and to consider whether it be so, and to collect reasons, *and thus to bring that truth into their minds rationally*” (AC 7298:2).

The same thing applied to the Lord’s personal presentation of the truth in this world. His work with the disciples was foundational, both formative and informative, *but not absolutely compelling* – ***until the disciples witnessed His resurrection and then reflected back on all the things that He had said and done before that.*** In fact they didn’t even **recognize** him in the resurrection, **even** after He “expounded to them in all the Scriptures the things concerning Himself,” until finally He broke bread again with them, rekindling all the memories associated with that action in the past – especially at the Last Supper. A similar thing occurred at the Sea of Galilee when,

after fishing all night without success the Lord appeared to them on the shore and told them to cast their nets on the right side. Then, not only did they catch their own but they found the Lord tending a fire with fish and bread already on it – surely evoking the memory of His miracle, feeding over five thousand people with just five loaves and two fish.

So as we engage with the Lord today, commemorating His Last Supper, we, too, can benefit by connecting this sacrament with our own knowledge and memories of His life. He is of course not IN the bread or the wine but these universal elements are symbolic of the two main characteristics of His life, His Divine love and wisdom, and our consumption of them represents our reception of those spiritual gifts so that we can put them to work in our lives.

One of the special characteristics of this ritual is its appeal to all of our physical senses. When we *see* the bread and wine we are reminded of His presentation of these same things to the disciples, including the miracle of water changed to wine and the many occasions when He broke bread with them. When we *hear* His teachings in preparation, and especially the words themselves that He used at the Last Supper we are reminded of His “fervent desire,” as Luke puts it in his Gospel, to share this with the disciples before He suffered the crucifixion. “This is My body which is given for you; this do *in remembrance* of Me” (Luke 22:9).

Of course He did not mean this bread was literally His body, any more than He meant He was the physical sun when He said, “I am the light of the world” (John 8:12), but He used this stuff we call “the staff of life” to represent the love and compassion (“our daily bread”) that He offers every one of us if we will just accept and assimilate it and make use of it in our daily work.

Now as you approach the chancel to partake of these elements one

of the things you may notice is the aroma surrounding them. Experience shows that the sense of smell is particularly powerful in evoking memories, but of course in our case the memories will relate to our own lives. This can be positive – or negative if you’ve had a bad experience, say, with alcohol. But the important thing in this ritual is to recall the good and the truth that these things really represent. Who, for example, doesn’t feel a spontaneous sense of warmth and hospitality at the smell of freshly baked bread? And one of the uses of fermentation is the purification of juice so that it is safe and pleasing to drink – in moderation, of course.

The aroma of the bread and wine invites us in and prepares us to enjoy their benefits. Then, the touch and taste confirm our reception of these things *and what they represent* in our lives. This is the heart of the ritual. By actually getting up out of our seats and coming forward to the chancel rail, bowing before the Lord and reaching out to take, eat and drink the elements we actually confirm that we are serious about this process of being nourished by the Lord.

That being the case, what do you think? Should we in humility take only the smallest piece of bread on the plate, or should we take enough to really taste and savor? How much of the Lord’s goodness do we want? Remember, it’s not how much we think we deserve, it’s how much we want – still having consideration for others. It is similar with the wine. There’s something very powerful in going through certain motions, and not just watching, listening or thinking about things – kind of like signing a contract rather than just agreeing to something tacitly.

And of course, one of the reasons for this is the profound correspondence involved in the very existence of the bread and wine. Whether we realize it or not, these things are natural forms that come into being as physical expressions of their spiritual counterparts, that is, those qualities and characteristics flowing from the

Divine love and wisdom that actually *cause* material things to appear. The correspondence is based on USE, so what love and wisdom do for the human spirit bread and wine do for the body. The spiritual and the natural cannot be separated, even though it's a completely unconscious connection. So when we eat the bread, specifically unleavened bread, we participate in an activity that directly correlates with our reception of pure, uncorrupted goodness (yeast corresponding to corruption), and when we drink the wine, which has been fermented with yeast) we represent our acceptance of truth that has been purified and rectified as a result of temptations suffered and overcome in this world.

Did you know, by the way, that there's a very small percentage of alcohol in the blood of every person? It's all part of the digestive process. So a little extra does not significantly change the body's chemistry, but the act of consciously receiving it demonstrates our acknowledgment that we depend on the Lord for all our wisdom and that we recognize we get it all from Him.

Finally, there is something very significant in partaking of the holy supper together as members of this fellowship we call the church – even though, and maybe especially because, each one of us will be approaching it in a different way, with different concerns, different prayers, different resolutions, and so on. Having answered the Lord's call one way or another we are all in this together, and we are here at least in part to support one another, at least in part by contributing to the powerful sphere of this commemoration.

And no, incidentally, it is not *necessary* to go through a long process of self-examination and repentance before approaching the holy supper. It is expedient, and it can be useful, but the references to this in our teachings are not intended to restrict participation but to promote the whole business of in-depth self-examination, which, we read, is sufficient if done just a few times a year, as *for example*

when preparing for the sacrament (TCR 530).

The disciples were not perfect at the time of the Last Supper. Judas was even plotting at that very moment to betray Him – possibly thinking he could expedite the Lord’s victory over His accusers (which would account for his suicide later). But the Lord knew that their participation in the ritual would strengthen them *if or when they thought about it afterward*, and confirm them in the truth that was so obscure to them at the time. So in our cases, if we come to the sacrament with good intentions, and not with any thought of pretending to ourselves or others that we’re good enough just as we are; if we come worthily, according to the definition of worthiness given in the Writings, that is, *with faith in the Lord and charity toward the neighbor* (TCR 722), then heaven itself can be opened to us (TCR 719) provided only that we follow through, and make use of the encouragement we feel at this time to continue to persevere in our commitment to the Lord and to improve the quality of our interactions with the people around us.

If we haven’t looked into our private thoughts and motives for awhile, and especially if we haven’t seen anything in particular we need to work on, let this be an opportunity to take those steps and do something to clear the way for the Lord’s own *much better* love and wisdom. Is there anyone we need to apologize to? Is there anyone we need to forgive? Is there something in particular we need the Lord’s help to overcome or do? Let’s pray about those things tonight as we come before the Lord, and let’s accept His merciful and generous support as we do so.

Amen.

Lessons: *Luke* 22:1-23 & 39-54
True Christian Religion 702 – 730,
Topical Headings II – VIII Only

An Opening Prayer for this Service

Lord, Jesus Christ, we come before You this evening in commemoration of your Last Supper and Your crucifixion, recognizing the grief and pain You suffered for us, asking for the strength and the means to honor You so that Your work for us will not have been in vain.

Give us courage and commitment, O Lord, and help us to remember the things You teach us so that we can live with confidence in Your Word and enjoy the peace of heaven in our daily lives.

The Lord’s Prayer