

Holy Thursday 2020
"A Foretaste of the Feast to Come"
Matthew 26:29; Hebrews 11:39-40

"I tell you I will not drink again of this fruit of the vine until that day when I drink it new with you in my Father's kingdom (Matthew 26:29)."

"And all these, though commended through their faith, did not receive what was promised, since God had provided something better for us, that apart from us they should not be made perfect (Hebrews 11:39-40)."

This Lenten season, we have spent our time in the 11th chapter of the book of Hebrews. We have visited the great heroes of faith from Abel, to Noah, to Abraham, to Joseph and to Moses. All these people walked by **faith** and not by sight. They heard and believed the promises of God. And the writer to the Hebrews says in conclusion that they did not receive what was promised since God had provided something better for them, and us, "that apart from us they should not be made perfect."

That is a very strange phrase, is it not? "... that apart from us they should be made perfect." The idea here is there is no separation between the people of the Old Testament and the people of the New Testament. We are in this thing together. We are all together waiting for perfection to appear. In the end, we all will be "made perfect." On the last day, all things will be made perfect. But until that time, there is incompleteness and imperfection in all things experienced in life. One believes but never receives, at least not in this life, the very thing that is promised. It was true for the saints of old. It is true for the saints of today. We both are being drawn forward like a mule being led with a carrot on a stick. We reach for the thing that its promised, but we never receive it in this earthly life.

Remember what we said about Abraham's faith? He was promised land, a nation coming from his body, a savior who would come from his

lineage. And, he never saw these things. He had one child in his old age, and even then, his only son that he loved was almost taken away from him. Abraham is called “the father of all who believe” because he is the perfect example of faith ever hearing the promise but never seeing it come to pass.

So, too, the story of Moses. He saw things that were promised coming to pass. He saw the great plagues fall upon Egypt. He saw the waters divided so that the children of Israel could walk across the Red Sea upon dry land. Yet, Moses never got to set foot in the Promised Land. Moses was taken up a high mountain only to see it from a distance and then he died and was buried.

Which brings us to the Sacrament of Holy Communion, where in bread and wine, the promise of Christ is delivered to us. Christ has promised us two things in the Sacrament: the gift of his own body and blood and the forgiveness of our many sins. We receive both these things in faith in the Sacrament of the Altar. But, there is still the sense of incompleteness in the Sacrament. There is also this sense of waiting, even wanting, something more perfect. As Jesus said, "I tell you I will not drink again of this fruit of the vine until that day when I drink it new with you in my father's kingdom (Mt 26:29)."

This is not some stray or obscure comment by Jesus. All three Gospels that give us the institution of the Sacrament give us these same words of Jesus. They all mention how Jesus sees this Sacrament as something that will still be more fully realized and celebrated on the last day. There is still something yet “out there” to be fulfilled. That “something” is the Marriage Feast of the Lamb in heaven when Jesus will sit at the table with His church

In the Sacrament of the Altar, sure and certain things are given to us, but yet there is still a sense in which the story goes on. There is this continuation. Guarantees are given. Pledges are received. But these guarantees and pledges are for something yet to be fully experienced.

So, consider the Lord's Supper a small meal, a snack if you will, to tide you over until the final banquet. Think of it as the manna and quail that sustained the children of Israel in the desert those forty years. It was all a meal to tide them over until they came to the "land flowing with milk and honey (Ex 3:8)."

We use the word "sacrament" to describe the Lord's Supper. That is because the sacrament is a sacred act. It is action that comes to us from the Lord. But the older word used to describe this meal was "mystery." The Sacraments were described as mysteries of the faith. Baptism is a mystery. This is why the Apostle Paul called himself and his fellow pastors "stewards of the mysteries of God (1 Co 4:1)."

The great thing about this word "mystery" is that it always reminds us that the sacrament is still incomplete. There is something yet to be revealed on the last day. If you read a mystery novel, then you never know what is truly going on until you get to the very end. You have to read that final chapter when the mystery is finally known!

This is what Jesus gave us in this Sacrament. There are sure and certain things given to us and faith holds onto these things. As we eat Christ's own Body and drink His blood, we receive forgiveness, life, and salvation. But this meal is still a foretaste of the feast to come. It still pulls us and draws us to the future when all things will be revealed and we will walk by sight, and not by faith.

We are only baptized once, but we are invited to come to the Lord's Supper again and again. In baptism, we are joined to the death and resurrection of Christ. We are given the gift of the Holy Spirit to govern our lives. And, we receive forgiveness and new life. But then we are called to come to the supper of our Lord. We go through instruction. We learn the words of institution. We are taught to confess our sins and receive the sacrament of the altar in faith trusting the words of Jesus, "This is my body. This is my blood shed for the forgiveness of your sins ."

But then we are never done with these things. Jesus said, "Do this, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of me (1 Co 11:25)." He calls us back to the Sacrament of the Altar because our need for it never ends. Did we stop sinning? Do we stop dying? Do we still need hope and grace, peace and strength? Do we no longer need encouragement to go on in the faith?

The Sacrament of the Altar still calls the church to meet together for prayer and worship. On the day of Pentecost when the Christian church was born, we have this description in the book of Acts, "Those who received [the] word [of the apostle Peter] were baptized, and there were added that day about three thousand souls. And they devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers (Ac 2:41-42)."

Notice about three thousand were baptized. And immediately they devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and the fellowship of the church, and the "breaking of bread," that is, the Sacrament of the Altar. This tradition began two thousand years ago, and still continues to our day. We, too, devote ourselves to the "teaching of the Apostles," that is, hearing and learning God's Word. We, too, continue in the fellowship of the church

and in the worship of the church together, for it is here that Christ still gives forgiveness, encouragement and peace. He gives us the strengthening of our faith and love to share. That's why we keep coming to the sacrament of Holy Communion because we need the meal to tide us over until we feast at the Marriage Feast of the Lamb in heaven.

Jesus said, "I tell you I will not drink again of this fruit of the vine until that day when I drink it new with you in my Father's kingdom (Mt 26:29)." So, we come from our individual homes and busy schedules to gather at the table the Lord Jesus has set before us. And we eat and drink the sure and certain gifts that our Lord gives – His life-giving Body and Blood and the forgiveness for our many sins. And yet, we receive this Sacrament with a sense of longing for when the perfect will appear, as well. For this is but a foretaste of the feast that is yet to come.

In the Name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.