

Maundy Thursday

For as often as you eat this bread and drink this cup, you proclaim the Lord's death till He comes.

Throughout this Lenten fast, we have gloried in the cross of Jesus Christ.

We spoke of how the crucifixion is the redemption of God.

How it reveals the nature of the Son of God.

How it shows the Father's posture of love toward us.

How it reveals the very nature of the Holy Trinity.

And we began and ended with how it is the very shape of the Christian life.

In short, we are learning to see through the eyes of St. Paul how everything in heaven above and on earth beneath has its source and ending in the cross.

When we sang the Christmas hymn, "He the alpha and omega. He the source, the ending, He."

Paul has filled in the blanks that "He" is none other than Jesus Christ and Him crucified.

Now, as we approach the finish-line of Lent, we come to the high-point of the Church's year and the earliest festival set on her calendar.

For here, in liturgical form, we come to the very center of our faith.

This is the holy of holies—these three days are the inner sanctum.

And now, as we stand on the threshold of this event, it is well to now take up the following question: How is this most precious cross to be apprehended?

And when we ask this question, we find that we are not the first to ask it.

In fact, Jesus and His disciples stood at the very same place.

"On the night in which He was betrayed," they gathered in an upper room for one last supper before the betrayal.

One time of teaching and eating before the passion began.

And, even if the disciples did not understand it at the time, Jesus did.

So, it is no surprise that Jesus would take this moment to teach in the plainest of language, how this holy and salutary cross is apprehended.

We know what would have been the answer if He left it up to the world...

For we have seen it unfold in countless distortions and speculations throughout the New Testament era.

Some have said that the crucifixion of Jesus is an example of God's love to which we should aspire. And that the cross belongs to those who aspire to it.

Some would say that Christ's cross is a metaphor for understand a fundamentally transcendent and unknowable God. and that this understanding saves us.

Some say that Christ's cross is a myth about life out of death and that the event itself is less important than its message and meaning.

Some would say that the crucifixion is God's bid to demonstrate His love in earthly terms—to play on our emotions so that we might be moved to loved God

And that it is this loving emotion toward God which is saving faith.

Some have even said that the cross itself—it's wooden shards, encased in glass and gold—are a source of spiritual grace that we can benefit from directly.

Some have said that we are to apprehend the cross by spiritually ascending to heaven to find it there.

But tonight Jesus cuts through all of this speculation and human reason to teach plainly and simply something altogether different.

All of these things were distinct possibilities for the disciples too.

Possible interpretations of the event that was about to unfold before them.

But then, just as now, Jesus takes us aside before it begins to teach us where the cross is to be found.

I received from the Lord that which I also delivered to you: that the Lord Jesus on the same night in which He was betrayed took bread; and when He had given thanks, He broke it and said, "Take, eat; this is My body which is broken for you; do this in remembrance of Me." In the same manner He also took the cup after supper, saying, "This cup is the new testament in My blood. This do, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of Me." For as often as you eat this bread and drink this cup, you proclaim the Lord's death till He comes.

Here, in the simplest language possible, Jesus teaches you, His disciples, that you do not come to the cross through any efforts of your own devising. metaphors.

Rather, the cross comes to you by the institution of the Son of God Himself.

The common thread that unites every false supposition about the cross is that it is something that we must now make our own...

...whether it be by works, or meditation, or remembrance, or understanding, or emotions, or anything else.

But Jesus corrects all of these in one simple statement: The cross is yours and its benefits are yours right here, in the bread and cup.

"As often as you eat this bread and drink this cup,"

That is how the Lord's death is proclaimed.

That is how the Lord's death is made yours.

To be sure, faith is necessary.

To be sure, understandings are involved.

Emotions, emulation, meditation.

All of these are caught up in the Communion.

All of these are made holy by the body and blood.

All of these are filled with Christ crucified.

But not in such a way that they become the focal point.

Not in such a way that they add to, or complete, what Jesus has finished.

Rather, in such a way that they are added to.

In such a way that they are completed by what Jesus does here.

The cross remains all, in all. Jesus Christ, and Him crucified is your life.

And on the night in which He was betrayed, He instituted this Holy Supper for you.

So that His body, His blood, His sufferings and His death might be given to you.

Not by your powers or spiritual skills. Not because you are better at thinking about the cross, or feeling the cross, or loving than others.

But because the same Jesus Christ, crucified, still takes bread and cup into His hands and gives you, in them, to share in all that He is.