



**Devotions of the Blessed Sacrament and Rosary begins at St. Richard's on January 23 and on Fourth Sundays of the Month after the 10:30 a.m. liturgy.**

### **Devotions of the Blessed Sacrament – What it this? Why?**

As a Lutheran by heritage, the notion that Roman Catholics display the consecrated host of holy communion in a monstrance for all to see and adore was thought of as abhorrent. Luther taught that the sacrament of the altar was to be received, eaten. That is that! Luther proclaimed that the Body and Blood of Christ are “really present” on, in and under the bread and wine of Holy Communion – Real Presence.

Richard Hooker described the Sacraments of Holy Communion and Baptism as “visible signs of invisible grace.” Anglican theologies of the Eucharist also affirm the real presence of Christ. Anglican (Episcopal) sacramental theology is informed by the principle of *lex orandi, lex credendi*, the law of prayer is the law of belief. Where my Lutheran background looks to a library of theological books called the *Book of Concord* in which theologies are spelled out, the Anglican tradition looks to our prayer as our theology, i.e. the *Book of Common Prayer*.

When I looked around for summaries of Eucharistic theology in the Anglican tradition, I came across this phrase, “Sacraments have both *form* and *matter*.” Uh-oh! My philosophy professor’s hat jumped onto my head immediately. That is Plato! That is not the Lord’s Supper growing out of a Hebrew context when Jesus met with his disciples for meals, especially the Last Supper. Plato believed that reality was divided into two dimensions, a dimension of “matter” or “accident” or “appearance,” and a dimension of “form” or “essence.” You and I and everything else is “appearance.” Only through learned rational thinking can we begin to discern the “forms,” which exist only as invisible essences in a dimension other than the one we are in. Plato used the Analogy of the Cave to describe this. It is as if we are chained to chairs in a cave looking ahead at shadows on the wall in front of us. What we see are the appearances of reality in which we live. Only when we learn to think rationally are we able to break our chains, get up, turn around and see the essential forms passing in front of a fire behind us, casting the shadows that we saw before.

Medieval Christian theology adapted this lock, stock, and barrel, but they Christianized Plato. As to the Holy Communion, they said that after the Consecration or Eucharistic Prayer, the appearance or “accident” of the bread and wine is still bread and wine, but the form or essence changes into the Body and Blood of Christ, hence the term “transubstantiation.”

Are you thoroughly confused yet?

We Anglicans tend to treasure our “wide” understanding of these theologies, accepting a span of interpretations sometimes referred to as “high,” “broad,” and “low,” however pejorative that may sound. Consider what we used to say in the older versions of the *Book of Common Prayer* as the host was given to the believer: “The Body of our Lord Jesus Christ, which was given for thee, preserve thy body and soul unto everlasting life. Take and eat this in remembrance that Christ died for thee, and feed on him in thy heart by faith, with thanksgiving.” If you look at this sentence carefully, you will see an accommodation of several eucharistic theologies. “The Body of our Lord Jesus Christ,” – strong real presence. “Take and eat this in remembrance that Christ died for thee” – a kind of Reformed theology of

remembrance of the Passion. "...feed on him in thy heart by faith, with thanksgiving" – the implication that the holy communion is entirely a spiritual experience.

The "glory" of our Episcopal tradition is that many of you may embrace one or more of these interpretations and hold them faithfully with an open mind to others of us who might differ some or a lot on how we view Christ in the Eucharist. I would say that St. Richard's tends toward a strong theology of Real Presence in that we retain the ceremonies of the consecration with signs of the cross and elevation of the consecrated elements more than once during the prayer, and we use the new Prayer Book language, "The Body of Christ; the bread of heaven." We also carefully reserve the consecrated sacrament and keep it in the Aumbry with a lit candle next to it. We either consume the remaining bread and wine at the Eucharist, reserve it to be taken to the sick and homebound, or, as we have had to do during the pandemic, return unused consecrated elements to the ground.

So, with all this as background, can we "adore Christ in the most holy sacrament?" I say, "Yes, we can." It has to do with another tradition in Christianity called "Iconography." What do we Christians do with icons, statues, and with consecrated elements of holy communion? Some more radically reformed Christians would accuse us of idolatry. I would say carefully and clearly that the quote above, which is directly from the order for Benediction, is correct. We *adore* Christ. We do not adore the sacrament, we eat it. We do not adore the water of baptism; we wash people in it. But we do bless ourselves with that water, and we can, I believe, be blessed by praying in the presence of the Eucharistic elements.

When one kneels in front of the statue of Mary in our Lady Chapel and lights a candle in prayer, one is not worshipping Mary. One is praying to God, perhaps through Mary, perhaps even asking Mary to join in the prayer with us to God. These are mysteries. The great reformers as well as Roman Catholics and Eastern Orthodox all ultimately turn to mystery when they encounter the presence of God among us. Our sacraments are a mystery. We try to explain them, but our explanations pale when it comes to the mystery that they are.

Devotions of the Blessed Sacrament at St. Richard's along with a revised Anglican rosary prayer will be offered as part of our participation in the mystery of what it means to be a Christian, of what it means for our lives to be changed and for the whole world to be changed by the Incarnation of God in Jesus of Nazareth.

-Rev. Dr. Dale Truscott