

“The Invitation”

Luke 22:14-27

Tonight, we remember. We remember that it was on this night that our Lord instituted the sacrament of Holy Eucharist, the rite by which we share in his broken body and shed blood.

Now most will leave this service refreshed, released. But Some may leave unmoved, uninspired. What makes the difference? Perhaps most had a better night's rest or less on their mind; or fewer troubles at home, at work, or with friends than some. Or, perhaps most are simply in better emotional health than some. Perhaps. But, the key difference will be that Most will fulfill the qualifications for communion, while Some will not.

The qualifications are quite clear in this invitation to the Eucharist from the '28 Prayerbook.

“Ye who do truly and earnestly repent you of your sins, and are in love and charity with your neighbors, and intend to lead a new life, following the commandments of God, and walking from henceforth in his holy ways: Draw near with faith, and take this Holy Sacrament to your comfort...”

There are three specific qualifications mentioned in this challenging invitation. They are: repentance, love, and intention. So, let's look at these qualifications for a few moments. Because, how we address them will determine how we will leave this service.

Repentance is the first qualification. It is the key that unlocks the door to the Lord's presence; to direct communion with him. It is through the act of repentance that we turn from self-rule to God's rule. God's rule becomes creative in us only as we repent of the sin of self-rule and are governed by God's control. Every sin in our life is a manifestation of this

self-rule. To repent is, to literally, turn around; to make a radical turn from self-rule to God-rule. Repentance is the first qualification of communion with Christ.

Love is the second qualification of this invitation. This is about the quality of our relationships. Are we "...in love and charity with our neighbors"? Jesus clearly proclaimed that faithfulness to God and broken relationships could not mix. We cannot participate in this spiritual feast with full meaning if we harbor hostility and hatred against others. Love and charity are two closely related words; some translations of the Scriptures use them interchangeably. Love must have expression in overt acts of charity. We tend to love in general, but abhor in the specific. Like Linus in the cartoon strip, Peanuts, who said, "I love humanity, it's people I can't stand!" But God abhors the general and rubs our nose in the specific. He has never been more specific for the sickness of the world than he is in Jesus Christ. We are to let God's unmerited, unearned love flow freely through the channels of our lives to others; all others; even; no especially, the undeserving. Love is the second qualification of communion with Christ.

Here's the third qualification: Intention. Do we "intend to lead a new life, following the commandments of God, and walking from henceforth in his holy ways"? This question deals with our intent and our future. A new life! Is it really possible? Note that this thought is prefaced by the word intent. This qualification depends on our intention and not our performance. That is because our performance so often fails. That's why repentance is so needed. We often wonder why we find it so difficult to act in accordance with our best image of ourselves. It is because we need help. We need God's strength to fulfill a transforming intention. God will take our intention and give us power to follow through. But, for now, at this moment, intention is enough. Intention will start us into that new life we want to live.

This is good news for where we all ache and yearn. We are called into a new life under God's rule. To intend, to long to live in that new life is enough to qualify you and me for Eucharist.

There they are. The three qualifications: repentance, love, and intention. Jesus' words to the disciples that he would not drink of the fruit of the vine again until he drank it new in his Father's kingdom were immediate words of high comfort. They were also words of anticipation and promise. The night would grow darker. Cruel events lay ahead to break the stoutest of hearts. Despair might seem the only reasoned conclusion. But the kingdom was on its way! No one could stop it now! His death would only seal its victory.

We come to this Altar trusting in this victory. Though the night before us darkens, and events conspire, God has won. The resources of God's power are now yours and mine. The kingdom is come, and we have been invited to live in it! Come! The table is about to be set! Our Lord awaits!