

A Sermon by the Rev. Dr. Colton M. Smith on the Eighth Sunday after Pentecost, August 7, 2011 at the Chapel of St. Mark in Port Royal, South Carolina.

Giving Thanks

Lord Jesus, My Savior, let me now come to you:
My heart is cold; O Lord, warm it with your selfless love.
My heart is sinful; cleanse it by your precious blood.
My heart is weak; strengthen it by your joyous Spirit.
My heart is empty; fill it with your divine presence.
Lord Jesus, my heart is yours; possess it always and only for you.
AMEN. — Adapted by M.A.P. Wood from St. Augustine

It is not often, as a retired priest, that I have the opportunity to teach. I am going to take advantage of you as a captive audience, to teach a Sunday School lesson. My lesson this morning is the Great Thanksgiving selected for this Sunday – Eucharistic Prayer C. (**Prayer Book page, 369-372**) You may wish to follow the text in your bulletin. In this Great Thanksgiving we travel, as if in a space ship through time, from the beginning of time to now, as each of you sit in this place. We hear the recitation of “salvation history” as we share in God’s plan of divine love.

Like all of the other Eucharistic Prayers in our 1979 Book of Common Prayer, we begin with the Latin ***Sursum Corda*** or “Lift up your hearts” in English. **The Lord be with you. And also with you.** These are the words from The Book of Ruth as Boaz addresses the reapers in his field and they respond. (**Ruth 2:4**) This is a common Jewish form of blessing. This Old Testament salutation is joined by a New Testament admonition by Paul to the Colossians to SING PSALMS, HYMNS AND SPIRITUAL SONGS TO GOD IN YOUR HEARTS. (**Colossians 3:16**) **Lift up your hearts. We lift them to the Lord. Let us give thanks to the Lord our God. It is right to give him thanks and praise.** This greeting has been a part of the Christian Church’s celebration of the Holy Eucharist since the 3rd century AD.

It is at this point in The Great Thanksgiving, as presented in Eucharistic Prayer C, that we borrow a common tradition from the Eastern Orthodox liturgies. These liturgies contain more congregational responses throughout the prayer than most Western liturgies like Eucharistic Prayer A or B in our Prayer Book.

God of all power, ruler of the universe, you are worth of glory and praise. Glory to you for ever and ever. There is a emphasis on creation and the Old Testament drama of God’s continuing effort to draw his people back to him. **At your command all things came to be; the vast expanse of interstellar space, galaxies, suns, the planets in their courses, and this fragile earth our island home.** We are reminded of our custodial role in caring for God’s creation. **By your will they were created and have their being. From the primal elements you brought forth the human race, and blessed us with memory, reason, and skill. You made us the rulers of creation. But we turned against you, and**

betrayed your trust; and we turned against one another. Have mercy, Lord, for we are sinners in your sight.

The Old Testament is filled with story after story of God's struggles with his rebellious people. As the Psalmist sings: SOME WANDERED IN DESERT WASTES; THEY FOUND NO WAY TO A CITY WHERE THEY MIGHT DWELL. THEY WERE HUNGRY AND THIRSTY; THEIR SPIRIT LANGUISHED WITHIN THEM. THEN THEY CRIED TO THE LORD IN THEIR TROUBLE, AND HE DELIVERED THEM FROM THEIR DISTRESS. ... LET THEM GIVE THANKS TO THE LORD FOR HIS MERCY AND THE WONDERS HE DOES FOR HIS CHILDREN (Psalm 107:4-8) Are we not those rebellious children too?

Again and again, you called us to return. Through prophets and sages you revealed your righteous Law. We now travel in time to the New Testament world. And in the fullness of time you sent your only Son, born of a woman, to fulfill your Law, to open for us the way of freedom and peace. By his blood, he reconciled us. By his wounds, we are healed. And therefore we praise you, joining with the heavenly chorus, with prophets, apostles, and martyrs, and with all those in every generation who have looked to you in hope, to proclaim with them your glory, in their unending hymn: Our voices are not alone in the walls of this church building. We are joining the hosts of heaven in their unending praise. We are reminded in the Letter to the Hebrews that we are SURROUNDED BY SO GREAT A CLOUD OF WITNESSES. (Hebrews 12:1) Once again we combine Old Testament verses of Isaiah 6:3 and New Testament verses of the Revelation to John 4:8 in the *Sanctus*. Holy, holy, holy Lord, God of power and might, heaven and earth are full of your glory. Hosanna in the highest. Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord. Hosanna in the highest. (pause)

Since the beginning of Christian worship, emerging from its Jewish roots, every Eucharistic celebration has contained a four-fold action: Jesus 1) took, 2) gave thanks [in the Greek language "ευχαριστησιτια"], 3) broke, and 4) shared.

And so, Father, we who have been redeemed by him, and made a new people by water and the Spirit, now bring before you these gifts. In our Eucharistic Prayers there are three basic elements: one is the Invocation of the Holy Spirit or "Επιχλευσις" in Greek. Sanctify them by your Holy Spirit to be the Body and Blood of Jesus Christ our Lord.

Second is the Words of Institution. You may think these are quotes for the Last Supper recorded in the Gospels. These words predate the writing of the Gospels. Actually they are the words of St. Paul as he describes a Eucharistic celebration in the 1st Letter to the Corinthians. **On the night he was betrayed he took bread, said the blessing, broke the bread, and gave it to his friends, and said, "Take, eat: This is my Body, which is given for you. Do this for the remembrance of me." After supper, he took the cup of wine, gave thanks, and said, "Drink this, all of you: This is my Blood of the new Covenant, which is shed for you and for many for the forgiveness of sins. Whenever you drink it, do this for the remembrance of me." (1 Corinthians 11:24-25)**

And the third element in our Eucharistic Prayer is the Memorial Acclamation or again in the language of the early Christians, “Ἀναμνησις.” Anamneis is the antithesis of amnesia. A person with amnesia has lost identity and purpose. To know who you are, to whom you belong, and where you are headed, you must remember.

A Jew was one who through **anamesis** had crossed the Red Sea and entered the promised land. This is Passover. A Christian is one for whom, through **anamnesis**, the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ is a present reality. A Christian is one who has already entered the kingdom though it is not yet realized in its fullness.

The offering of praise to the Father flows into a remembrance of the redemptive work of the Son in his death and resurrection. **Remembering now his work of redemption, and offering to you this sacrifice of thanksgiving, we celebrate his death and resurrection, as we await the day of his coming. Lord God of our Fathers; God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob (God of Sarah, Rachael and Rebecca - an acknowledgment of our spiritual mothers as well); God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ: Open our eyes to see your hand at work in the world about us. Deliver us from the presumption of coming to this Table for solace only, and not for strength; for pardon only, and not for renewal. Let the grace of this Holy Communion make us one body, one spirit in Christ, that we may worthily serve the world in his name. Risen Lord, be known to us in the breaking of the Bread** recalls for us the response given in our Lord's resurrected appearance to disciples on the road to Emmaus. (Luke 24:31)

Our Eucharistic Prayer concludes with a Trinitarian doxology: **Accept these prayers and praises, 1) Father, through 2) Jesus Christ our great High Priest (Hebrews 4:14) recalling the title given to Jesus in the Letter to the Hebrews, to whom, with you and 3) the Holy Spirit, your Church gives honor, glory, and worship, from generation to generation. AMEN.**

Yes, my friends, we are in that “upper room.” We are walking with Him to the Cross. We are in the garden on that first Easter morning. We are on that road to Emmaus. In this Eucharist, time and space are shattered. The gates of “heaven” are opened. Our participation in the kingdom of God is a living reality. What remains to be said? What remains to be done? Jesus took ... gave thanks ... broke ... **(pause)** share! Share among ourselves and share with the world around us. **The gifts of God for the people of God. Take them in remembrance that Christ died for you, and feed on him in your hearts by faith with thanksgiving “εὐχαριστησιᾶ”. Amen.**

Here ends the Sunday School lesson.