

If you were to choose one passage in the New Testament which sums up our faith it is possibly the passage from 1 Corinthians 11 that we have just heard. For starters, it is our warrant, our licence to practice, if you like, the most sacred act of worship that takes place in the Church. And secondly, being written around AD55, it is actually the earliest recorded evidence of the Lord's Supper (the gospels having been written down some ten or more years later). These are the earliest recorded words of Jesus Christ himself.

Now the Sacrament of the Eucharist, The Lord's Supper, Holy Communion, etc. (they all mean the same thing) is a very difficult one to begin to understand – indeed, we will never fully understand it this side of the veil between life and death. In many ways, though, understanding it isn't necessary to gain benefit. As an illustration, I don't need to know how a cam-shaft works in order to drive a car; or how microchips work to use a mobile phone. We don't *need* to understand the mystery of the Eucharist to benefit from it, but it does us good to try to get a glimpse of what Jesus meant when he spoke of the bread and the wine in the way that he did.

And so we our journey to the upper room, made ready for our Lord to celebrate the passover – as Jews the whole world over would do that very night. It's a simple enough room with couches for the guests to recline at as they eat (it's not like Leonardo's famous painting with a long table and everyone seated around it on chairs). After the main meal has finished Jesus takes the bread and wine and in two simple actions turns our universe upside down altogether.

“This is my body; this is my blood”. Now it is clear he did not mean that *literally* – he was still alive at the time and using his own body and blood. At that moment, flesh and bread, blood and wine were clearly separate, physical things. Additionally, he didn't mean simply that this *represents* my body and blood. It is far more than that. In taking it into your hands and eating and drinking with faith and love it is not only a memory but a living contact with Jesus.

To get a better idea we need to remember what a sacrament actually is – an outward, visible sign of an inward, spiritual change. There is a huge element of grace and faith needed – but it is that grace and faith which allows us, at the distribution, to respond to the priest's direct words, “The Body of Christ” and “The Blood of Christ” with a positive “Amen” - “I believe”. For then we are confirming our faith that Jesus is, indeed, present in that great sacrament.

There is a very complicated Greek word which is used to describe what is taking place in the Eucharist- anamnesis (it is the same root as amnesia which we normally associate with forgetting things completely and totally). In this instance it is dealing with remembrance something in a very complete way obeying our Lord's command, “Do this in memory of me”.

But it is not simply a memory-jogger. It isn't simply carrying out the actions of Jesus “parrot-fashion” in order to replicate what took place at the last supper. If that were the case, then the bread and wine would still be, simply, bread and wine. The Eucharist is far more than a performance of a play.

Similarly, the Eucharist is not a piece of hocus-pocus in which the actions of the priest, in following a set pattern of actions and words, bring about some mystical change. The Eucharist is far more.

Anamnesis means to *actually partake in that self-same event*. At the altar tonight, as on every altar at every Eucharistic service, we are all in that upper room, with Jesus and his disciples,

partaking in that *same* Eucharistic meal. Christ's body and blood is offered once, for all. We don't offer it again and again at every Eucharist but share in that once-for-all offering. Although it sounds like science fiction, we are participating in that same Event – the Lord's Last Supper is celebrated once, throughout all of time and space. Together.

Now, recognising that Christ is present in the Eucharist may cause us some discomfort. Paul goes on to say that we must not partake of it unworthily. But who of us *is* worthy to share that meal with our Lord?

Paul is saying that we need to recognise what these sacred symbols mean. We need to approach them with reverence in recognition of the love with which they were given. One thing we must be clear of is that the phrase is not there to bar the sinner who recognises themselves for what they are. There is a story of an old priest seeing an old woman hesitate to receive the cup stretching it out to her and saying “Take it woman, it's for sinners; it's for you.”

If Christ's table were only for perfect people, none of us could ever approach it. It is never closed to the penitent sinner. To the person who loves God and their fellow men, the altar is always open and their sins, however bad they may be, are forgiven through that broken body and shed blood.