



## Week I: Jesus the Lord, Giving Himself

### Scripture References

God so loved the world that he gave his only Son (John 3.16-20; Romans 8.32); Jesus offered himself for the life of the world, obedient to his mission from the Father (Hebrews 10.5; John 10.18); Paul speaking about the Lord's Supper (1 Corinthians 11.23 – 29) shows how Jesus offers himself in our worship.

### From the Book of Common Prayer

#### Prayer of Consecration

ALMIGHTY God, our heavenly Father, who of thy tender mercy didst give thine only Son Jesus Christ to suffer death upon the Cross for our redemption; who made there (by his one oblation of himself once offered) a full, perfect, and sufficient sacrifice, oblation, and satisfaction, for the sins of the whole world; and did institute, and in his holy Gospel command us to continue, a perpetual memory of that his precious death, until his coming again: Hear us, O merciful Father, we most humbly beseech thee; and grant that we receiving these thy creatures of bread and wine, according to thy Son our Saviour Jesus Christ's holy institution, in remembrance of his death and passion, may be partakers of his most blessed Body and Blood: who, in the same night that he was betrayed, took Bread; and, when he had given thanks, he brake it, and gave it to his disciples, saying, "Take, eat; this is my Body which is given for you: Do this in remembrance of me". Likewise after supper he took the Cup; and, when he had given thanks, he gave it to them, saying, "Drink ye all of this; for this is my Blood of the New Testament, which is shed for you and for many for the remission of sins: Do this, as oft as ye shall drink it, in remembrance of me."

**Amen.**

## From the Book of Common Prayer (contd)

### Prayer of Thanksgiving

ALMIGHTY and everliving God, we most heartily thank thee, for that thou dost vouchsafe to feed us, who have duly received these holy mysteries, with the spiritual food of the most precious Body and Blood of thy Son our Saviour Jesus Christ; and dost assure us thereby of thy favour and goodness towards us; and that we are very members incorporate in the mystical body of thy Son, which is the blessed company of all faithful people; and are also heirs through hope of thy everlasting kingdom, by the merits of the most precious death and passion of thy dear Son. And we most humbly beseech thee, O heavenly Father, so to assist us with thy grace, that we may continue in that holy fellowship, and do all such good works as thou hast prepared for us to walk in; through Jesus Christ our Lord, to whom, with thee and the Holy Ghost, be all honour and glory, world without end. Amen.

## Commentary on BCP Prayers

These prayers demonstrate that Holy Communion is all about God's self-giving. God loved the world so much that he gave his only Son, Jesus Christ, who in turn gave his life for all on the cross (John 3.16; John 10.18).

As the risen Lord he is given to us in the Holy Communion service. Filled with Christ's presence, we give our lives back to God through Jesus Christ and implore him to make us fruitful in works of love.

## Reflection by Revd. Dr. Jonathan Jong

*Rector of Cocking with West Lavington, Bepton and Heyshott*

The word "love"—like most words—is used in a variety of ways. Very often, it connotes a desire to consume or possess. This is for example the "love" of "I love ice cream" or "I love those shoes". But this understanding of love is also commonly applied to the love between persons.

Whenever we love someone for what they do for us, or how they make us feel, or even how they make us better people, we are participating in this kind of love, which treats the beloved at least partly as a means to some end. There is nothing inherently wrong with this kind of love, though people ought not be treated solely as a means to some other end.

Furthermore, it is a very natural—a very human—way to love someone or something. All the same, Christians understand love differently. The distinctively Christian understanding of love comes from the distinctively Christian understanding of God, which is the doctrine of the Trinity.

There are many ways to talk about the Trinity (all of them inadequate), but one way is to say that it is an account of what it means that God is love. Christians do not just say that God loves; nor only that God is loving; we insist that God is love (1 John 4.8, 16).

What this means is that love is inherent to the nature of God: and that even before there is anything external to God to love, there is already love within the life of God. This life is the Trinitarian life of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, who are three yet one.

Again, there are many ways to talk about the three-yet-oneness of God (again, all of them inadequate), but one is to say that the identity and existence of each Person is absolutely and inextricably bound up in the others, such that they exist only in relation to one another.

The Father is nothing except what is given to the Son and the Holy Spirit and received from them; and the Son is nothing except what is given to the Father and the Holy Spirit and received from them; and the Holy Spirit is nothing except what is given to the Father and the Son and received from them.

In other words, the Triune God is the perfect mutual self-giving of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. Yet this account of the Trinity may seem rather abstract.

But Christians also believe that the nature of God has been revealed in the very concrete life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ. The Incarnation is the Trinity translated into human and historical terms. There are many ways to describe the life of Jesus, but it is above all a self-sacrificial life, culminating of course in his own death for the sake and good of the world. As the New Testament underlines: God so loved the world that he gave his only Son (John 3.16-20; Romans 8.32).

In Christ, God offered (and indeed still offers) Godself as a gift for our sake and our good, even while we were (and are) still sinners (Romans 5.8). And this act is entirely "within character" for God, whose very being is a life of self-giving.

As the Incarnation is the translation into human and historical terms of the Triune life, so the Eucharist is the Incarnation made present for us here and now, not only in theory but in physical reality, as real as bread and wine, flesh and blood. This Sacrament of his Body and Blood—given for us (Luke 22.19, 1 Corinthians 11.24)—is the same gift as Christ's "full, perfect, and sufficient sacrifice" on the cross, which—as we have just seen—is the manifestation in time and space of the eternal self-giving of the Son in the divine life of the Trinity.

Our participation in the Eucharist is therefore not only a participation in the life, death, and resurrection of Christ into which we were baptised, but also in the divine life itself, which is—to return to the point with which we began—a life of love, understood from a Christian perspective.

Of course, we are called to be eucharistic people not only in church on Sundays (or at weekday Eucharists!), but throughout our lives. Our faith—in the Triune God, in the Incarnation, in the Holy Communion—must shape and inform our lives, not least by shaping and informing our understanding of love.

Christians and non-Christians alike talk about loving others, whether it is our children or parents or spouses or family members, friends, and neighbours, or even our enemies. But for Christians, this—self-giving for the sake and good of the beloved—is what we must mean.

This understanding of love is what marital promises are based on, for example, in which we pledge our bodies, our worldly goods and indeed all that we are to one another. Marriage is a sign of love between two individuals, to be sure: but it is also a sign of love itself, the self-giving love of God.

The Christian life of love obviously extends beyond marriage. And so, this understanding of love is also what underpins the moral injunctions we find in the gospels: to love our neighbours and enemies as we love ourselves, which is to value their lives and well-being as we value our own, and no less.

This is no small thing: the calling to the Christian way of life is a high calling, which we will inevitably fail to answer in full. But thanks be to God that love covers a multitude of sins

(1 Peter 4.8), and is offered to us continuously, as we are reminded each time we approach the altar, to be given nothing other than Love Incarnate.

## Martin Earle writes

The crucifix is double sided with an identical design painted on each side. It has been designed to hang from Aberdeen Cathedral's chancel arch directly above a large altar.

In this position, visible both to servers and priests in the sanctuary and the faithful in the nave, the crucifix is intended to be an image which draws and unites the attention of everyone present. Christ is represented as the Living One, the Lord of history and true Oriens of prayer.

Each week when you reflect on part of the crucifix ask yourself or discuss in a group how the image enhances our theme this week.

## Reflection on this week's image

The wound in the side of Christ crucified reveals God's total self-giving for us: how can we respond by giving ourselves to God in love?

## Questions for Discussion

- What difference does it make to you to think of God as love per se, rather than just as loving?
- In what ways, in the gospels, do we see the life of Jesus as a life of self-giving?
- Are there parts of the eucharistic liturgy that speak especially of our participation in the sacrificial life of Christ?
- How does thinking of the Christian moral life as being about self-giving change the way you think about ethical questions you face in your life?