

As an Anglo-Catholic parish, celebration of holy communion (the eucharist, the Lord's supper, etc.) is central to the life and ministry of the Parish of St Mark. I'm sure that, for most of us, Sunday just doesn't seem like Sunday if the holy eucharist isn't the focus and intent of our worship experience. As where Christian traditions and denominations outside of our own will emphasize other aspects of the worship experience such as preaching, Biblical exegesis, music, or divine healing, to be an Anglo-Catholic is to seek to know God and to follow His commandments through observance and participation in the sacramental ministry of His church, most notably in the mass. This centrality of the holy eucharist in our worship would appear to align us with other religious bodies and traditions that similarly do not shy from owning the descriptor of "catholic" as regards their theology and structure, most notably the Roman Catholic and the Eastern Orthodox churches.

I always enjoy the conversations I'll sometimes have with our more informed and erudite parishioners or inquirers seeking to deepen their understanding and engagement with this holy sacrament. A word that often comes up is "transubstantiation". Do we as Anglicans believe in the doctrine of transubstantiation? My answer is invariably "no" and many people, especially the more conspicuously "catholic minded" among us find such an answer distressing because, on its face, it seems as though, by denying transubstantiation, that I am saying that Christ is not truly, physically present in the bread and wine of the holy eucharist. That the holy communion as observed within the Anglican tradition is a symbol or memorial and that terms such as "body" and "blood" are metaphorical. This, however, is not the case. It really comes down to a specificity and application of sacramental terms. I, along with many Anglicans, believe that our Lord is present in the elements of holy communion.

Now, those people who have really done their homework and like to see clergymen squirm most often at this point will direct my attention to the second paragraph of article twenty eight in the Thirty-nine Articles of Religion. These Articles of Religion, while not as binding and restrictive as, say, the catechism of the Roman Catholic Church, still illustrate many perspectives and parameters held within the

wider Anglican world as evidenced by their being included in the Book of Common Prayer from 1928 all the way back to the time of Elizabeth I.

The pertinent portion of the article in question, that one appropriately titled "On the Lord's Supper" states in its second paragraph that:

"Transubstantiation (or the change of the substance of Bread and Wine) in the Supper of the Lord, cannot be proved by holy Writ; but is repugnant to the plain words of Scripture, overthroweth the nature of a Sacrament, and hath given occasion to many superstitions."

Seems pretty cut and dry and would appear to place Anglicans within the orbit and influence of Presbyterian or Congregationalist bodies who have historically rejected the notion of a real presence in the sacrament opting for a symbolic interpretation. Indeed, many devout and confessing Anglicans have interpreted the Church's teaching on holy communion in just such a way. Nevertheless, there is and always has been within Anglicanism a great number of equally devout and confessing people of faith who interpret Our Lord's proclaiming how "this is my body" as a statement of fact and not metaphorical language. Those who believe, in short, in the "real presence" of Christ in the Eucharist.

To deny transubstantiation is not to deny the possibility of a real presence either. The doctrine of transubstantiation such as it is taught within the Roman Catholic Church is an attempt to define and explain just what that real presence is and how it is happening during holy communion. There are, however, a number of theological modes and methods of describing this most sacred of mysteries of Christ being truly present in the sacrament of His Body and Blood. The doctrine of transubstantiation as taught within the Roman Catholic Church is merely one of these modes

and methods and not one that churches of the Anglican patrimony make an article of faith or indispensable doctrine. That said, there are now and throughout history Anglicans who believe the specific doctrine of transubstantiation to be the best way of describing that real presence of Christ which is central to that holy mystery just as that holy mystery is central to our lives as catholic Christians. The fact that such Anglicans, perhaps those most catholic of the Anglo-Catholics, continue to exist right alongside equally devoted Anglicans who see holy communion as a very powerful metaphor, but still a metaphor all the same, points to one of the great strengths of our faith. So long as a person confesses Jesus Christ and would seek to do His will, there is likely going to be a place in the broader Anglican family of churches. As our Lord promises in the eleventh chapter of St Matthew's gospel:

"Come unto me, *all* ye that travail and are heavy laden"

I added the italics on the word "all" because that "all" is, I believe, central to understanding the sacraments. Just as Christ's message was for all the world, so too is the comfort and the power of the sacraments for all who would believe in Him and call upon Him. That goes for Anglicans who see things as symbols right along with those who would, even despite the words of the Thirty-nine Articles, hold to something very much like the doctrine of transubstantiation taught by churches outside our own.