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## **THE FOURTH WORD Faith Forsaken and Forsaking A TRUE AND SPIRITUAL BODY**

### THE FOURTH WORD

#### Faith Forsaken and Forsaking

ON this fourth Sunday of the Lord's Resurrection – the third after Easter – we acknowledge the fruit of Christ's Fourth Word from the Cross – the terrible cry of dereliction, which Jesus gave "about the ninth hour" (about 3 o'clock): "Eli, eli, lama sabachthani? That is to say, My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?" (Matthew 27:46). HisThis is a cry de profundis, from the terrible sorrow of depths of darkness and desolation, of the one who though himself without sin who was "made sin" for us, who yet experiences in himself the fullness of our sin's alienation of our sin. Yet though all turn from God, who darkness and desolation, God is still God, he is still "my God". From takes upon himself the very depths burden of our curse and condemnation Jesus makes a prayer. At the same time, it is the cry of purest faith, for God is still God, he is still "my God". And so this point of furthest remove from God is also the turning point, the point the Son begins his return to the Father, and sorrow passes over into joy. Jesu

The victory of faith forsaken and forsaking is the subject of this Sunday's lessons. In the gospel lesson (the first of several from the Last Supper discourses) Jesus tells his disciples of the sorrows of desolation which they will experience when he forsakes them in his death. "Ye shall have sorrow" he warns them, "but your sorrows shall be turned into joy" – the joy of a faith which looks beyond the desolations of worldly hopes to the changless and eternal good of God revealed in the Resurrection. These sorrows will be the birthpangs of the new life of faith, reconciliation to God, and a new life in the Spirit.

This "passing over" from sorrow to joy, from the world to the Father, is the meaning of our lives as Christians. Those who have forsaken this world's hopes for the passing over to eternal joy are "strangers and pilgrims" in this world, "just passing through", but using their time here to pass over from sin to righteousness, forsaking "those things which are contrary to our profession", the "fleshly lusts which war against the soul", and freely submitting themselves "as the servants of God" and "for the Lord's sake" to "every ordinance of man", that "with well doing they may put to silence the ignorance of foolish men". "O be joyful in God, all ye lands, alleluia: sing ye praises unto the honour of

his Name, alleluia: make his praise to be exceeding glorious, alleluia, alleluia, alleluia (Introit. Psalm 66. Jubilate Deo.)

#### A TRUE AND SPIRITUAL BODY

#### TRUE BODY

Ave verum corpus, natum de Maria Virgine,/ Vere passum, immolatum in cruce pro homine.... The 14th century eucharistic hymn, well-known in its setting by Mozart, gives affective expression to the doctrine of the real presence of Christ in the eucharist:

Hail, true body, born of Mary, Spotless Virgin's virgin birth;

Thou who truly hangedst weary

On the cross for sons of earth;

Thou whose sacred side was riven, Whence the Water flowed, and Blood,

O may'st thou, dear Lord, be given

At death's hour to be my food:

O clemens, O pie,

O dulcis Jesu, fili Mariae.

But what does it mean to hail Christ's "true body", really present in the Holy Communion? To many, both Catholic and Protestant, this seems to require a grossly materialistic understanding of the sacrament; and some have preferred to speak instead in purely symbolic terms. But the soul craves reality, not just symbols. The story is told of a literary lady dining with Flannery O'Connor who gushed about the richness of the symbolism of the eucharist. O'Connor responded: "If it's just symbolism, I say to hell with it". Moreover, a merely symbolic account does not do justice to the scriptural texts. Christ declared "this is my body", and Saint Paul asked, "the cup of blessing which we bless, is it not the communion of the blood of Christ? The bread which we break, is it not the communion of the body of Christ?" (1 Corinthians 10:16).

Our teachers in the faith in the English reformation found a way to understand the eucharist that was neither grossly materialistic nor merely symbolic. One finds their views expressed, for instance, in Article XXVIII, Of The Lord's Supper (Prayer Book, p. 608): "The Supper of the Lord ... is a Sacrament of our Redemption by Christ's death: insomuch that to such as rightly, worthily, and with faith,

receive the same, the Bread which we break is partaking of the Body of Christ; and likewise the Cup of Blessing is a partaking of the Blood of Christ." (Notice the echoes of Saint Paul in 1 Corinthians 10:16.) Thus the Article affirms a real partaking of the Body and Blood of Christ, yet with this important qualification, and guard against superstition: "the Body of Christ is given, taken, and eaten in the Supper, only after an heavenly and spiritual manner. And the mean whereby the Body of Christ is received and eaten in the Supper, is Faith." As Cranmer wrote "Christ's body and blood be given to us in deed, yet not corporally and carnally, but spiritually and effectually".

This affirmation of a true and spiritual presence of Christ in the bread and wine of the eucharist is the teaching of the Prayer Book and the English reformers. Next week, I will consider the basis for this understanding.

### **The Rev'd Gavin G. Dunbar**

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