

Christmas 2020

Many of us have missed sharing Communion together for almost a year now. But I'd like to refer to it for a moment to get at the heart of this ancient, Christian ritual and, at the same time, the heart of what this day is all about. From the early biblical accounts we have the words from Jesus: *do this in remembrance of me*. This term for remembrance is a special idea that we are not simply recalling to our minds an event but are actually, in the truest sense of the term, remembering. We are with Christ, placing the pieces of the moment back together. So that instead of this being a kind of symbol, it is in actuality the real presence of Jesus Christ. There is a fancy term for this: anamnesis. In much the same way a stop sign is both the action and the sign, the bread and wine of Communion are both simultaneously pointing us to something infinite while being the same infinite thing. In Holy Communion, we are very truly, wrapped up in the moment. What a thing to miss these many months.

But I use the idea of a stop sign and the term infinite here on purpose because as we stay apart to stay safe, Communion is an essential part of what has been keeping us together. I always like to say we are what we eat and I believe this is especially true of the body and blood of Christ. We have Christ coursing through our veins and collectively we are the body. So that whereas we may be missing this wonderful ritual in the Church, we are not missing the essence of it. It is a part of who each and every one of us is. It is the essence of who we are.

This is particularly important this year as many of us will be alone on Christmas or have different plans that may not be as exciting, or even just the sadness of missing beloved traditions. Important because we have to remember that what Jesus has done as an adult he has done as a newborn child as well. The feast of the nativity is the feast of recognizing and welcoming the love of God incarnated in the person of Jesus Christ. A divine mystery where one person existed with two natures – the human and the divine, so that we might remember our true nature as children of God, created in the image of God. This babe in a manger is both an image, like a stop sign, and a reality, like the action. The anamnesis of this day is the reality that we are always beloved children of a divine Creator, we are always creatures born of the dust of stars, we are always more than the sum of our parts, and we are always one with each other, creation, and God.

In this, today is not a lonely day. It is not a different day. It is not less of a day. It is the same day as every day: a gift, a chance, a time for renewal, the experience of joy and hope. One of my daughter's favorite Christmas carols when she was little was "God Rest Ye Merry Gentlemen". This made me give it a more thorough listen and since then I have appreciated the line: let nothing you dismay. Why? Because we have the birth of Jesus, so here are some tidings of comfort and joy. Such a message is certainly eternal, and worthwhile receiving this day. I would like to expound upon it but I would only mess it up. So instead, I will end today with words too wonderful for me from the great, Christian mystic Julian of Norwich: *See that I am God. See that I am in everything. See that I do everything. See that I have never stopped ordering my works, nor ever shall, eternally. See that I lead everything on to the conclusion I ordained for it before time began, by the same power, wisdom, and love with which I made it. How can anything be amiss?* Merry Christmas.