

## **“A few thoughts: “ Consubstantiation vs Transubstantiation...”**

**28/10/18**

**I speak in the name of Jesus the Christ, in the power of the Holy Spirit, to the glory of God the Father.**

**Amen.**

A few years ago I was asked to take a service in a well known protestant church in the City Bowl. The service went off without hitch. I was the Assistant Priest to St Michaels and All Angels in Observatory at the time. This had also been the parish largely responsible for my formation as an ordinand, Deacon and Priest. After the service had finished and I had completed my greetings at the front door to the church, I gathered my belongings and made my way to the church hall to join the parishioners for tea. As I walked past the kitchen I was quite shocked to notice the sacristans pouring the consecrated grape juice from the Mass back into the bottles. Furthermore, the consecrated bread squares were simply tumbled back into a non-descript container in the kitchen. I stopped for a second and paused, not sure what to do. Should I say something? I decided to look the other way. This was not my church. I was a guest here.

What the experience did do for me in that split second is challenge me as to what my beliefs were when it came to the Blessed Sacrament. I was immediately reminded of the training I had received at university on the idea of consubstantiation vs transubstantiation.

However, before we unpack these academic terms within the context of communion, I feel it may be prudent for us to reflect for a moment on our general understanding of the Eucharist, what it means to us and how the theology works around this crucial sacrament.

You may recall that I preached on the topic of the Eucharist a few years ago? Please feel free to access either my personal website or the church website to re-read that sermon again.

The meals which Jesus is recorded as sharing during His earthly ministry proclaim and enact the nearness of the Kingdom, of which the feeding of

the multitudes is a sign. In His last meal, the fellowship of the Kingdom was connected with the imminence of Jesus' suffering. After His resurrection, the Lord made His presence known to His disciples in the breaking of the bread. Thus the Eucharist continues these meals of Jesus during His earthly life and after His resurrection, always as a sign of the Kingdom. It is the new paschal meal of the church, the meal of the New Covenant, which Christ gave to His disciples as the anamnesis of His death and resurrection. Christ commanded His disciples thus to remember and encounter Him in this sacramental meal, as the continuing people of God, until His return. The last meal celebrated by Jesus was a liturgical meal employing symbolic words and actions. Consequently the Eucharist is a sacramental meal which by visible signs communicates to us God's love in Jesus Christ, the love by which Jesus loved His own to the end.

What then is the meaning of the Eucharist?

The Eucharist is essentially the sacrament of the gift which God makes to us in Christ through the power of the Holy Spirit. Every Christian receives this gift of salvation through communion in the body and blood of Christ. In the Eucharistic meal, in the eating and drinking of the bread and the wine, Christ grants communion with Himself. God Himself acts, giving life to the body of Christ and renewing each member. In accordance with Christ's promise, each baptised member of the body of Christ receives in the Eucharist the assurance of the forgiveness of sins and the pledge of eternal life.

This then raises the whole debate of consubstantiation and transubstantiation when we take part in the Eucharist.

What do these big words mean to you and I and how do they make a difference to us as Christians participating in our worship?

The word "transubstantiation" derives from the Latin "trans" (across) and "substantia" (substance). This term is mostly employed in Roman Catholic theology to denote the idea that during the ceremony of the Mass, the bread and wine are changed in substance into the flesh and blood of Christ, even though the elements appear to be the same. This doctrine was adopted by the fourth Lateran Council in AD 1215, formalised at the Council of Trent in AD 1545 and finally reaffirmed at the Second Vatican Council in 1962.

You may recall me using conjoined forefingers and thumbs during the Mass once I have consecrated the host. This is part of my Anglo-Catholic training which believes that once the host is consecrated, the host becomes the actual body of Christ, hence the absolute reverence. The idea of keeping your fingers joined is that this action will prevent any crumbs between your fingers from dropping on the ground or off the corporal.

Consubstantiation is different in its approach. This term is commonly applied to the Lutheran concept of the communion supper. The idea is that the body and blood of Christ coexist in union with each other.

Luther illustrated it by the analogy of the iron put into the fire whereby both fire and iron are united in the red-hot iron and yet each continues unchanged.

What do Anglicans believe? Well, the beauty of the Anglican Church is that we are a diverse group of Christians that worship under the same umbrella, even if we do have slightly different beliefs about certain doctrines. Many Evangelical Anglicans believe in the pneumatic presence of the Eucharist (consubstantiation), while many Anglo-Catholics believe in the corporeal presence (transubstantiation).

There is no need for us to unpack these doctrines any further this evening. It is merely important that you have a general awareness of the two views. If you are interested in the topic, I encourage you to do some reading around the matter.

What is important, whether you find yourself leaning towards transubstantiation OR consubstantiation is that all our actions during the Eucharist, are with holy reverence and respect at all times. The fact remains, whether the host and wine are symbolic of the Body of Jesus, or the real flesh and blood, is that Jesus died for our sins and by participating in the Eucharist, we become part of the salvation story, as we enter eternal life. The Eucharist is both a privilege and a gift for and to us. We must never take it for granted. It is the sacrament that we all hold very dear and close to our hearts. It is what sets us apart as Christians and followers of Jesus. Jesus Himself might be less concerned with actual doctrine and more concerned with what is in our hearts and going on between us and our neighbours when we participate in the Last Supper.

I am reminded of the beautiful words found in John:

“For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, so that whosoever shall believeth in Him, shall not perish, but have life everlasting.

God bless you next time you participate in the Eucharist.

Amen.