

HOLY WEEK 2010
Maundy Thursday
1 Cor. 11.23-26
The Lord's Table

Of all non-Gospel readings, this one of most familiar – but so familiar that take for granted and miss much of what it says. Moreover, we so familiar with riches of our tradition of the Eucharist, that easily miss aspects which are less prominent or have been passed over in our tradition.

(1) Note what Paul calls it – Lord's Supper (1C 11.20), *Lord's S*. He is the host. 1st Christians would have taken for granted – accustomed to receive invitations 'to dine at banquet of the Lord Serapis' – where god Serapis would be host; temples = restaurants of day. Paul refers to in 1C -10.21. For Christians, Christ = host; host both as consecrated bread, *and* as the one who invites, head of table – as in Heb, Christ both High Priest *and* sacrifice. So should not get confused by our talk of priest as 'President of Euch', as though celebrating priest is host. No! Christ is host – the *Lord's Sup*.

(2) Easy to forget what S =. Our Cambridge experience. S here = meal – better Lord's dinner/ evening meal. In Corinth = pot luck supper. Problem: well-to-do going ahead; poor/ slaves missing out. So 11.33. Not here to relieve hunger (11.34, 22). Here to *share* a meal – if miss sharedness, miss something essential to what all about.

(3) 11.25 – 'after supper'. Implies 11.24 at *beginning* of meal. As with normal practice – take, bless, break, give – as in Mk 6.41. Blessing important: point is that as all partake of bread, so all partake of blessing – shard bread = shared blessing. Again easily missed by focus on thanksgiving (Eucharist); but blessing important.

(4) 'After supper' – as bread at beginning of meal, wine at end of meal – *whole meal came between*. This was J' normal practice with discs; they ate regularly together; much of J' teaching given at table. LS = last of their regular practice. Point is, sacrament included *whole meal* – the bread & wine brought to focus significance of whole meal. Should not forget how central to J' ministry was shared meal/ table fellowship: tab.fell. expression of kingdom of God, Mt 8.11; expression of gospel – J ate with tax-collectors and sinners (non-religious). Shared meal implied acceptance, openness to/welcoming the other, the one with diff views/ attitudes/ practices – why so hard when Christians now refuse to eat with each other at the *Lord's table*.

Earliest churches followed J' practice – Ac 2.46 (breaking bread in each others homes). In C. Paul so distressed because they were forgetting this, denying it in practice of the well-to-do ignoring poorer members – not really sharing / accepting the other. They were failing to discern body of Christ – not just bread, but congregation together as body of Christ. Earlier Paul had to rebuke Peter for withdrawing from tab.fell. with Gentile believers (Gal 2.11-14); to refuse to accept those who Christ accepted – not acceptable!

Sadly we've lost so much of this dimension: the essential horizontal dimension, sharing; we focus more on thanksgiving (eucharist) than shared blessing; on aspect of personal devotion, vertical, rather than *also* on horizontal. Early Church tried to retain in Agape (love-feast), but soon lost it. And various renewals (like Methodism) tried to recover Agape, but again it's been lost. But

was important for Paul – and for J. So worth bearing in mind when we receive communion; it is *communion*, sharing, shared participation, not only with Christ, but with others – communion because a shared experience. 1 Cor. 10.16-17.