

Which hath made us meet to be partakers of the inheritance of the saints in light.

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Have you ever thought how strange it is that regardless of the time of year, every Sunday we remember the Crucifixion and death of Jesus? Even on Christmas Eve and Christmas Morning at Mass, we recall the night in which Jesus was betrayed, the night before He was crucified. And while we are preparing for Christmas, even on Jesus' birthday, in the midst of all the greenery and decorations, the Crucifix is still placed prominently over the altar. The image of Jesus' death confronts us always, even amidst the celebration of His birthday. Do you notice the crucifix during Advent and Christmas? Do you notice the *words ...in the night in which He was betrayed He took bread and said...this is my body which is given for you....* on Christmas Eve? The seasons change, the liturgical colors deepen from green to violet and the focus of the collects, epistles, and Gospels move from growth in holiness to preparing ourselves for Christ amid all our holiday preparations. But one thing will always stay the same, regardless of the seasons, regardless of the lessons, all through Advent, through Christmas, Epiphany, Lent and Easter, we celebrate the Mass. Bread and wine will be offered, consecrated, distributed and received, and it will become, mystically and mysteriously the body and blood of Jesus Christ.

We are quickly approaching the season for Advent, the season of penitential preparation for Christmas and which most priests fear has lost its significance to the world. The season for making a spiritual preparation to meet Jesus is overshadowed by all the preparations for Thanksgiving, Christmas, and New Year's, lost somewhere among the many decorations and gifts. Some have even returned to old medieval customs of fasting during Advent, but only so they will not gain too much weight between Christmas and New Year's! But even if we indulge ourselves in the cultural holiday season, for far too many the season of joy is only a reflection of fleeting happiness. They have forgotten that the most wonderful time of the year, is a celebration of their salvation through the wondrous incarnation of Jesus Christ, which is what gives true joy, everlasting joy, joy that spills over into eternity and the inheritance of the saints in light.

Fr. Austin Farrer, an Anglican Priest and theologian, a friend and contemporary of C.S. Lewis, is famous for his Paragraphs on the Blessed Sacrament. In his paragraph for this Sunday he writes, “The Church celebrates the sacrifice of Christ with joy and not with sorrow. It would be an outrage ever to regret that God had achieved his purpose, and if there is one thing God has certainly desired, it is that he should be sacrificed for our salvation. His sacrifice is a joyful feast, a wedding, a drinking of wine. We make merry with a bridegroom because he has obtained what he desired, and we rejoice with the Divine Son, because he has his desire also. He desired to unite his Church with him by an irreversible act, and in dying he has accomplished it. It is the overflowing of the bridegroom’s pleasure that enlivens the guests, and the Church rejoices in the overflowing of the joy of God. We cannot be as glad at what Christ has done for us, as he is glad to have done it.”

The Crucifix over the altar is no longer a symbol of cruel death, but of Joy. The Words of Institution recounting the night in which Jesus was betrayed, even during Advent and Christmas, infuse this season with heavenly meaning. This is the joy of salvation which the Church teaches all year long. Salvation which has come to earth as a little baby, who offers Himself not just for us only but for the whole world. The baby we celebrate on Christmas morn grew up to be sacrificed for our salvation, so that we may be absolved of those sins that strip us of joy. In this coming season we celebrate our assurance in God’s Heavenly Kingdom. *We cannot be as glad at what Christ has done for us, as he is glad to have done it.* Jesus calls us to a life of joy, but true joy tempered with repentance so that we may experience His absolution and be enlivened by Him. He enlivens us by the Holy Spirit through Holy Communion, a sacrifice and feast of joy. While Fr. Farrer writes that the Holy Communion is a joyful feast, yet we know the seriousness of coming to Holy Communion of how it is not to be taken lightly. We know how important it is to make a worthy Communion. But let us not forget that our actions after leaving the altar rail our just as serious, for this is a joyful feast. We should be the most joyful of people because we take Christ with us into the world, who has done so much for all mankind.

The Church rejoices in the overflowing joy of God and yet we here below, through mere elements of bread and wine, only touch the hem of His garment. The way we worship now is only a small reflection of what we will see in heaven. The collects, epistles and gospels, the hymns, and sermons only begin to scratch the service of the mysteries of God and salvation. The joy that we experience here below is nothing compared to the joy that we will have in heaven. But it is here on Sunday morning, and at every Mass that we join spiritually with all other Anglicans, Catholics, and Orthodox and take our part in the overflowing of the joy of God. Amen.