

We're in "The Word" segment of this Eucharist service. We will shortly begin "The Communion" segment with an "Offertory Sentence." We have several to choose from. But, with this being Lent, and our Gospel reading being about the forgiveness and reconciliation of the Prodigal, how can I choose any sentence other than the one that reads, "If you are offering your gift at the altar, and there remember that your brother has something against you, leave your gift there before the altar and go; first be reconciled to your brother, and then come and offer your gift." - Come and offer your gift.

The offering belongs to the Holy Communion, it is not a part of the Peace or the announcements, or even that part of the Eucharist service we call "The Word." It is very much an integral part of communion and it (that is the offering) must be predicated upon forgiveness and reconciliation. Forgiveness from and reconciliation with God and Neighbor. "Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength and with all your mind' and 'Love your neighbor as yourself."

However, having read that: Deliver us from the presumption of coming to this Table for solace only, and not for strength; for pardon only, and not for renewal. Let the grace of this Holy Communion make us one body, one spirit in Christ, that we may worthily serve the world in his name. Risen Lord, be known to us in the breaking of the Bread.

The Eucharist is every bit as much about sacrifice as much as it is about the solace and pardon found in forgiveness - for it is in Christ's sacrifice that we find that strength and renewal. Christ's sacrifice is a full, perfect, and sufficient sacrifice, oblation and satisfaction. This recognition in no way demeans the significance of forgiveness, it simply leads us to the source of that forgiveness.

The Eucharist requires us to join our lives with the living source of forgiveness, that is Christ's sacrifice. "We offer our sacrifice of praise and thanksgiving to you, O Lord of all. Presenting to you, from your creation, this bread and this wine." "Unite us to your Son in his sacrifice, that we may be acceptable through Him, being sanctified by the Holy Spirit."

Unite us to your Son in his sacrifice. We are united to Christ's full, perfect and complete sacrifice through our sacrifice of praise and thanksgiving. Our meager gifts of bread, wine and money.

Please don't think of the offering as a means of purchasing God's Grace. It won't be bought! Don't think of The Church of the Redeemer as just another community-based charity. Don't consider your pledge just another monthly bill. These are presented at the altar as an integral part of Holy Communion for a deeply spiritual reason. We are part of the extended Body of Christ on earth. That spiritual reason is nothing less than Christ's Sacrifice. The source of our forgiveness and reconciliation with God and others.

Christ's sacrifice. He was rejected, He was crucified. He wore a crown of thorns, and so blood flowed from his forehead ---- his hands and feet. His side was pierced and so even more blood flowed down his broken body, across the rough hewn wood of the cross and trickled into the dust there at the foot of the cross.

"Remember that you are dust, and to dust you shall return." Just weeks ago, at the very beginning of lent, here in this place, I made the sign of the cross on your forehead in ashes. And I told you that you then - that you are dust and to dust you shall return - a pretty negative concept. Unless - Unless we pause to reflect that, the strength, the renewal and the lifeblood of God has flowed into that dust that you are. You are dust, but as believers, you are dust mingled with the Blood of Christ. The resurrected Christ.

Because he was truly human he returned to the dust - because He was truly God He was raised from the ground. We will return to the dust, but because we are baptized in that death, we too shall be raised. Because we are united with Christ's in Holy Communion with him and other's we are forgiven.

Yes that is the message of the Easter Season. But it's also the message of Lent. It is nothing less than the Gospel. Holy Eucharist is nothing less than the Gospel of Jesus Christ celebrated in sacramental form.

"After supper he took the cup of wine; and when he had given thanks, he gave it to them, and said, Drink this, all of you: this is my Blood of the new covenant, which is shed for you for the forgiveness of sins."