



**Fourth Sunday after Epiphany.'05**  
**A sermon by the Rev. Canon George Chassey**

In the summer of 1944, in the midst of the battle for Normandy, the then Archbishop of Canterbury, William Temple made an address on the BBC. In his remarks he said, "The world will be saved from political collapse by one thing only and that is worship." The Archbishop's words are as true today as they were sixty years ago. I would add to his remarks not only political but moral, ethical and economic collapse.

Regular attendance at worship, being faithful in joining with people of like mind in worship is the means, the path to the heart, the mind, and the soul being opened to the holiness, the truth, and the love of God. Here is a place in which the Holy Spirit is truly present in the promise of Jesus, "where two or three are gathered together, there I am among them." Coming together at the Altar of God, sharing in the bread and the wine is in keeping with the practice of the first Century Church. As we read in the Acts of the Apostles, "and they continued steadfastly in the apostles teaching and doctrine, in the breaking of bread and in the prayers." Worship is the chief purpose of the church.

In 1953 Olive Wyon, a member of the faculty of St. Colm's College, Edinburgh, Scotland published a remarkable book entitled "The Altar Fire." She writes, "The title "The Altar Fire" is an allusion to the Jewish Temple worship, and the ever burning altar fire as recorded in the sixth chapter of Lev." Fire," she writes, "is a frequent religious symbol. Fire is new life and the fire bringer is the Mediator, who brings new life from heaven to earth. Early Christian writers often applied the term to Christ." "Thou who art all fire, have mercy upon me" was their prayer."

In the Eucharist she writes, "God acts-we receive and adore. Opening our hearts to Christ, submitting to His action, we receive fresh grace and strength from Himself, apart from any feeling we may or may not have at the time of communicating. For in this rite, as a whole, He gives us all we need-in Himself." End of quote.

In this sacrament, a gift and mystery of God, the whole meaning of the spiritual life is gathered up and the Christian Gospel, encompassed in the birth, life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ is proclaimed. As Olive Wyon writes, "God comes to us with His forgiveness and his strength." End of quote. The Holy Eucharist is the Sacrament of Hope. For our hope is in the Lord God who says, "Behold I make all things new." But, this is not the end of our worship. It is the beginning. Our worship has its true beginning with the words of the Prayer of Thanksgiving. "And now, Father, send us out to do the work you have given us to do, to love and serve you as faithful witnesses of Christ our Lord."

Our thanksgiving to God for "making all things new" by and through Jesus Christ is reflected in what we do with our lives, our resources, in the workplace, in the community, in our families, in inter personal relationships Dietrich Bonhoeffer puts it in these words, "Whoever sees Jesus Christ does indeed see God and the world in one. We can henceforward no longer see God without the world or the world without God." This is the true beginning of worship, to see God and the world as one.

You and I are called by God, through baptism, to His purposes. We are called to live out our trust in God in a broken and divided world. It is a world in which the pain and agony of human kind cries out, "we would see Jesus, we would see Jesus." Hear these words from the Sacrament of Holy Baptism.

Will you continue in the apostle's teaching and fellowship, in the breaking of bread and in the prayers? Will you persevere in resisting evil, and whenever you fall into sin, repent and return to the Lord? Will you proclaim by word and example the Good News of God in Christ? Will you seek and serve Christ in all persons, loving your neighbor as yourself? Will you strive for justice and peace among all people and respect the dignity of every human being?

This is the covenant we made with God at our baptism and confirmed at our confirmation. God's covenant with us assures us that we are the child of God, members of Christ, inheritors of the kingdom of heaven, and that Christ is our means of grace, and hope of glory.

Our lives as we live our part of the covenant are a reflection of our gratefulness to God for the gift of Jesus Christ. Today's gospel reading holds up before us what it is we are to about as persons who claim Jesus is Lord. In these opening passages from the Sermon on the Mount we get a word picture of Christ Himself. It has been said that the beatitudes describe the life of Christ. As Reginald Fuller points out "he was all the things and did all the things that the beatitudes enumerate. And that brought him to the cross, and beyond that to his resurrection."

What does that mean for you and me? It means that if we are faithful, and work and labor for people and their needs friends may look down upon us. If we stand for justice and mercy, where injustice and intolerance prevails we may be assailed. If we stand with the poor, the homeless, the forgotten, and labor for the true meaning of one nation, under God, with liberty and justice for all, we may be reviled, Friends and co-workers may desert us. This is the price of faithfulness to our commitment to God's purposes. Bear in mind it was not evil that triumphed that Good Friday. The Victory was won on Easter Day. That was God's victory!

As we journey through this mortal life, let us keep before the words from the letter to the Hebrews, "here we have not continuing city, we seek one to come."

St. Theresa of Avila writing centuries ago reminds us, "The only hands God has are our hands, the only feet God has are our feet, the only eyes God has are our eyes, the only voice God has are our voices."

Amen