

Lord, we thank you for your presence. Teach us, lead us, change us, anoint us by your Spirit, and send us on your mission. Through Christ our Lord. Amen.

Congratulations, ladies and gentlemen, you are about to embark on the most useless study there is—the study of Christian worship. Aristotle claimed that the supremely important activities are the most useless, because they exist precisely for their own sake and not for a greater external end. The worship of God is therefore the most useless and supremely important thing we can do. And, seeking to understand Christian worship is a most critical endeavor.

True/Right Worship: What is it?

So, what exactly is the purpose of Christian worship? In a certain sense, it has no purpose. It is an end in itself. But what happens in worship to make it so important? Why do we gather every week? It is in response to the calling of God. God's ultimate call to us is a call to true, or right worship—"orthodoxy"—"right doxology"—"true doxa"—"right glory." It's a call to true "worship," right "adoration."

Adoration comes from the Latin word adoratio—"ad ora," which means "to the mouth of," or mouth to mouth. Adoration is this intimate mouth to mouth relationship which is the essence of true worship. The Song of Songs begins, "Let him kiss me with the kisses of his mouth!" The Great Tradition interpreted this as the song of the soul singing to God for union. Union with God through Jesus Christ is the aspiration of true worship. Celebrating the mighty works of God in Jesus Christ in the posture of adoration is the proper aim of true worship. True, or right worship leads to the rightly ordered or integrated life, the rightly ordered family, the rightly ordered church, city, country, culture, even the rightly ordered cosmos. ***If you want a primary key to reading the entire biblical narrative, this is it—God is calling his creation to right worship (over and over again).*** God ultimately wants his people to worship him aright, not because he needs our praise, but because in that great act we become rightly aligned unto God through Jesus Christ, the primary worshipper. If worship has a purpose, that is it—becoming Christ-like.

Worship gives an appropriate "orthodox" structure to our relationship with the Great I Am, who wants to fire us with his love and his passion to set things right. When things are set right, the created order is re-Edenized, brought back to its original intent and order in the Garden of Eden. Fellowship, Word, Table, Mission, all elements of right worship serve that end—the reconciliation, or Edenization of the created order.

In the Great Tradition, worship is the participation of the people of God in the work of God. Through worship Christ our redeemer and high priest continues the work of our redemption in, with, and through the Church. Through worship the three offices of Christ the Head are manifested in and through the Mystical Body of Christ: **the priestly office, kingly office and prophetic office.** Worship is priestly in its offering of Eucharist for the life of the world; kingly in

inspiring concrete acts of charity, and prophetic in the proclamation and embodiment of the apostolic Gospel.

One of the seminal ideas from scripture and the Church Fathers is that humans were created to offer right praise to God. **The Garden of Eden** was centered on right praise, and Adam and Eve were tasked to multiply and be fruitful, Edenizing the whole world. What happened? Sin interrupted the project. In response, God chose Israel, called them to right worship centered on the **tabernacle first, then the temple**, and gave them the task to Israelize creation. But, it did not reach fulfillment—sin again entered the project. However, Israel was promised a Messiah who **would** fulfill that call. He would gather the tribes and cleanse the temple, restoring the right worship of Yaweh. Of course, this is accomplished by God himself in the incarnation, God in Christ taking on flesh in order to perfect the praise of the entire created order—in essence, Christifying the world.

We have the great privilege of engaging the world, telling the world its true story, and bringing it to the right worship of the only God who is ultimately true, good and beautiful. God wants right worship so **we** can be rightly ordered and sent on mission. This is why the focus on true worship is at the very core of the Christian faith, and why the study of worship is of supreme importance! The Bible is God's story of how he chooses and shapes a people with his heart and mind to praise him aright, to reverse that process of dis-integration, to re-integrate, to re-order our lives around Christ, and to go out on mission to participate in the reconciliation of creation. The content and structure of our worship simply summarizes the Biblical narrative where God's people are called to Edenize, to Israelize, to Christify, the entire created order.

So what is true worship? It is participation in that story of God's saving work in **Jesus the Christ**. It is the submission of humankind to God, to be cleansed, forgiven, changed into his likeness revealed in Christ through his word and table, and then sent into the world in mission **with fire** to love the world to the God who is perfect love, perfect truth, goodness and beauty.

We see this call to true worship clearly in **Jesus' encounter with the Samaritan woman at Jacob's well** in the 4th chapter of the Gospel of John. First, please notice some important details about this story. The woman came to the well, why? To draw water. When? At noon, the hottest time of day. Why was she alone? In that time, women didn't go to wells at noon, and they certainly didn't go alone. They went in the cool of the morning or evening, and always in groups. But this woman was living with the shame of scandal, having had five husbands and living with a man who wasn't her husband. She was ashamed, so she came alone at midday. Additionally, she was a Samaritan, hated by both Jews and Gentiles. She was a double outcast. And, obviously, she was a woman. A conversation between a man and a woman was not typically allowed in this culture. Let alone a Jewish man and a Samaritan woman. Let alone a righteous man and a sinful woman. She was actually a triple outcast. But there is yet more. As author Kimberly Mandelkow writes, she was "...looking for love and companionship - simple acceptance and affirmation. There is an intimacy that's lost in her - she doesn't know how or where to find that, so she looks in all the wrong places to find it... hurt by the unforgiveness and harsh judgments of others who are completely unaware of [her] own need to forgive [her]self." She thirsted for a transcendent love.

Now, we need to look deeper. What were wells in the Old Testament? Think here of Isaac, Jacob, Moses. Each found his wife at a well. Wells were symbolic of trysting places, locations for marriage proposal. This woman came to draw water, but she met God incarnate. Jesus offered true, intimate covenantal love to her, or union with God. Remember what I said earlier, that union with God is the aspiration of true worship? Furthermore, she came at high noon, or the sixth hour. Light always plays a significant role in John's Gospel. Darkness symbolizes ignorance and light symbolizes the life of Christ. In this story this woman stepped into the light of Christ at high noon, and Jesus the Christ offered her living water, the baptismal water of new life. Her first reaction revealed confusion, right? But soon after this Jesus came to the core of the conversation, "But the hour is coming, and now is, when the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth; for the Father is seeking such to worship Him. God is Spirit, and those who worship Him must worship in spirit and truth." This is a type of marriage proposal. Christ the bridegroom is seeking after the bride, saving her, redeeming her, washing her, loving her. Is there a more beautiful depiction of God the Son's pursuit of his bride? God is calling humankind to union with him, even the most marginalized of humankind, and that union with God is most viscerally and vividly experienced in worship, where humankind is divinized, changed into Christ-likeness and sent on mission to bring others, just like this Samaritan woman who brought many others to meet Jesus.

Worship as Play

Back to the uselessness of worship. In his great book **The Spirit of the Liturgy**, twentieth century theologian **Romano Guardini** equated worship, or in his writing the liturgy, with play. Wait—play? Guardini wrote this about the liturgy, "[In the liturgy] man, with the aid of grace, is given the opportunity of realizing his fundamental essence, of really becoming that which according to his divine destiny he should be and longs to be, a child of God. . . . [The life of the liturgy] speaks measuredly and melodiously; it employs formal, rhythmic gestures, it is clothed in colors and garments foreign to everyday life. . . . It is in the highest sense the life of a child in which everything is picture, melody and song." Beauty, art and worship go hand-in-hand.

Guardini goes on to write, "[The liturgy] has one thing in common with the play of a child and the life of art—it has no purpose, but is full of profound meaning. It is not work, but play. To be at play, or to fashion a work of art in God's sight—not to create but to exist—such is the essence of the liturgy."

We tend to think of play as trivial and work as serious. But really it's the exact opposite: play is serious stuff, more serious than work. Why? Work is something we do for the sake of something else, for a higher purpose. It is subordinate to an end beyond itself. But play—play is something we do for no purpose outside itself. It is done entirely for its own sake. It is higher, more beautiful and more precious than work. And the play of worship is what we will do for eternity. Heaven is a place of utter uselessness, but utter beingness, where we find our true identity as human beings. Note—we are not human doings, but human beings. Worship brings us into that place of "being" in the truest sense, in our original intention as created in the image of God, who is the essence of "to be" itself.

"The true object of all human life is play." -G. K. Chesterton

This year I have been reflecting on the topic of re-enchanting the Gospel with objective beauty. Here is a beautiful example of God's utter playfulness. In his delightful fourth chapter from **Orthodoxy**, "The Ethics of Elfland," G.K. Chesterton wrote, "The sun rises every morning. . . . Now, to put the matter in a popular phrase, it might be true that the sun rises regularly because he never gets tired of rising. His routine might be due, not to a lifelessness, but to a rush of life. The thing I mean can be seen, for instance, in children, when they find some game or joke that they specially enjoy. A child kicks his legs rhythmically through excess, not absence, of life. Because children have abounding vitality, because they are in spirit fierce and free, therefore they want things repeated and unchanged. They always say, "Do it again"; and the grown-up person does it again until he is nearly dead. For grown-up people are not strong enough to exult in monotony. But perhaps God is strong enough to exult in monotony. It is possible that God says every morning, "Do it again" to the sun; and every evening, "Do it again" to the moon. It may not be automatic necessity that makes all daisies alike; it may be that God makes every daisy separately, but has never got tired of making them. It may be that He has the eternal appetite of infancy; for we have sinned and grown old, and our Father is younger than we."

These words may seem fanciful, but the sensibility is correct. Whenever I play with **my grandson**, I really get this! This world and all that is in it, including humankind, are a generous, even lavish overflow of the love of God. The only reasonable response to the extravagant love of God poured out toward us is worship. Worship is Eucharistic, which means it is a giant "Thank you!" to God. Giving thanks to God is the natural, joyful, even spontaneous response of the recipient of God's abundant, effervescent grace and mercy manifested in Jesus Christ. And likewise the core of Christian worship is giving thanks, or in Greek, eucharisteo. In fact, we give thanks on behalf of all creation. What do I mean?

Leading the Praise of Creation

In worship we have the great privilege of leading the praise of all of creation. In the very beginning, Genesis 1 and 2, God brings forth creation in that beautiful poetic text. First, God created the heavens and the earth. Then we hear, "Let there be light, and there was light." Then the seas and the dry land, vegetation, plants yielding seeds, and trees. Then the sun and the moon to rule the day and night. Then the living creatures, fish of the sea, birds of the air, livestock and creatures that creep on the ground. This is like a stately liturgical procession (**St. Mark's Dome**) of elements coming forth from God. This is like a spiritual parade. Who comes at the end of a parade? (Not including the elephant dung guy.) Think of Macy's Thanksgiving Day Parade. Santa Claus, the most important guy in the parade! Now think of a liturgical procession, if you have ever seen one. Who is at the end? The celebrant, the person whose job it is to lead the praise of everyone gathered. When I process in our convocation services, I am not the end of the procession. Rather it is the celebrant, the person who leads our worship.

So it is in this liturgical procession in Genesis. Who is at the end of the procession? The celebrant, whose job it is to lead the praise of the entire created order that has gone before. The apex of creation is humankind, uniquely created in the image of God, the celebrants of this great liturgical procession of creation. God has given humankind the great privilege of being

the priests of creation. And we do that in the liturgy, or worship, famously called the source and summit of the entire Christian life.

In this orderly, liturgical procession, we understand the telos (purpose) of all of the created order—to worship the creator. Who comes at the end of the great procession of creation? The ones who will lead the praise—human beings, the priests. Our whole purpose is to be the priests of creation, leading all of creation in the great chorus of praise to the Creator God. In that act of adoration, we realize our deepest identity, who we are ultimately meant to be. That is the biblical vision of the rightly ordered life, and life oriented around right worship.

Humankind is meant to worship God and draw all of creation into that worship. Worship is the moment when we are most ourselves, because we have gathered in adoration, giving highest praise to God on behalf of all creation, for the life of the world. This is the cosmic emphasis of worship.

In his great book **For the Life of the World, Orthodox theologian Alexander Schmemmann** wrote this, (read this gender neutral) “The first, the basic definition of man is that he is the priest. He stands in the center of the world and unifies it in his act of blessing God, of both receiving the world from God and offering it to God—and by filling the world with this eucharist, he transforms his life, the one that he receives from the world, into life in God, into communion with Him. The world was created as the “matter,” the material of one all-embracing Eucharist, and man was created as the priest of this cosmic sacrament.” (p. 15) As priests of the created order, our priestly role is to give voice to the voiceless creation, to offer total praise, total Eucharist, thanksgiving to Almighty God.

Conclusion

In his book *Jesus of Nazareth*, **Joseph Ratzinger** writes, “...prayer, the self-opening of the human spirit to God, is true worship. The more man becomes “word” —or rather: the more his whole existence is directed toward God—the more he accomplishes true worship.” He goes on to say, “True worship is the living human being, who has become a total answer to God, shaped by God’s healing and transforming word.” This worship, he says, “...transform[s] people into an offering to God and make[s] the cosmos into praise and thanksgiving to the Creator and Redeemer.” Let me ask you what I ask myself: Are you allowing yourselves to “become word, with your whole existence directed toward God?” Are you being shaped daily by “God’s healing and transforming word?” Are you leading others to be “transformed into an offering to God, making the cosmos into praise and thanksgiving to the Creator and Redeemer?” If so, may God sustain you in that. If not, may God place that in your heart. Right worship, true worship, forms us into Christ-likeness and calls us and empowers us to mission by the Holy Spirit. As we are spiritually formed in worship, we “must decrease” and God “must increase,” as John the Baptist stated in John 3:30.

The great 14th century saint, mystic and doctor of the Church, **St. Catherine of Siena**, received this word from the Father: “Do you know, daughter, who you are and who I am? If you know these two things you will have beatitude within your grasp. You are she who is not, and I AM HE WHO IS.” Don’t read that as nonexistence. Rather, read that through the lens of John 3:30.

Something so important happens in a life committed to continuous worship and prayer (like St. Catherine), rooted in the God's Word and God's Church that it seems the worshiper and even the whole of creation is saturated and transfigured by the Divine life. We decrease (joyfully) and He increases (in joy as well). ***And that's how we ought to live each day; that's how worship rooted in the Bible and in the Church can powerfully form us and our fellow pilgrims for mission.***

We are called, all of us, to worship that is shaped by scripture, **formed by the Divine life of the Great Tradition of the Church, worship that reveals and embraces the apostolic faith, and bears the holiness, righteousness and transforming power of Christ to the entire created order.** In a very real, concrete and practical way, this Good News of Jesus Christ is proclaimed in the presentation and preaching of the Word, it is embodied in the celebration of the Table and the various expressions of worship arts, and it is sent out on mission as God's people go into all the world. We the Church participate with Christ in the power of Holy Spirit in transfiguring creation and calling it forth into the New Eden of God, that Heavenly Jerusalem, the eschatological purpose of the Church, both now, in this age, and in the age to come. That is God's great story—His reconciliation of the entire created order back to himself (2 Cor. 5:17-19) and his summon for us to join him in that acrobatic act of reconciliation, being poured out for the very life of the world. God help us to be faithful to that call.

“You are he and she who are not, and I AM HE WHO IS.”

Welcome to this most useless, but supremely important task—the worship of God the Father, through God the Son, in God the Holy Spirit.
In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit.

Lord, we thank you for your presence. Teach us, lead us, change us, anoint us by your Spirit, and send us on your mission. Through Christ our Lord. Amen.

Congratulations, ladies and gentlemen, you are about to embark on the most useless study there is—the study of Christian worship. Aristotle claimed that the supremely important activities are the most useless, because they exist precisely for their own sake and not for a greater external end. The worship of God is therefore the most useless and supremely important thing we can do. And, therefore, seeking to understand Christian worship is a most critical endeavor.

True/Right Worship: What is it?

So, what exactly is the purpose of Christian worship? In a certain sense, it has no purpose. It is an end in itself. But what happens in worship to make it so important? Why do we gather every week? It is in response to the calling of God. God's ultimate call to us is a call to true, or right worship—"orthodoxy"—"right doxology"—"true doxa"—"right glory." It's a call to true "worship," right "adoration."

Adoration comes from the Latin word *adoratio*—"ad ora," which means "to the mouth of," or mouth to mouth. Adoration is this intimate mouth to mouth relationship which is the essence of true worship. The Song of Songs begins, "Let him kiss me with the kisses of his mouth!" The Great Tradition interpreted this as the song of the soul singing to God for union. Union with God through Jesus Christ is the aspiration of true worship. Celebrating the mighty works of God in Jesus Christ in the posture of adoration is the proper aim of true worship. True, or right worship leads to the rightly ordered or integrated life, the rightly ordered family, the rightly ordered church, city, country, culture, even the rightly ordered cosmos. ***If you want a primary key to reading the entire biblical narrative, this is it—God is calling his creation to right worship (over and over again).*** God ultimately wants his people to worship him aright, not because he needs our praise, but because in that great act we become rightly aligned unto God through Jesus Christ, the primary worshipper. If worship has a purpose, that is it—becoming Christ-like.

Worship gives an appropriate "orthodox" structure to our relationship with the Great I Am, who wants to fire us with his love and his passion to set things right. When things are set right, the created order is re-Edenized, brought back to its original intent and order in the Garden of Eden. Fellowship, Word, Table, Mission, all elements of right worship serve that end—the reconciliation, or Edenization of the created order.

In the Great Tradition, worship is the participation of the people of God in the work of God. Through worship Christ our redeemer and high priest continues the work of our redemption in, with, and through the Church. Through worship the three offices of Christ the Head are manifested in and through the Mystical Body of Christ: **the priestly office, kingly office and prophetic office.** Worship is priestly in its offering of Eucharist for the life of the world; kingly in

inspiring concrete acts of charity, and prophetic in the proclamation and embodiment of the apostolic Gospel.

One of the seminal ideas from scripture and the Church Fathers is that humans were created to offer right praise to God. **The Garden of Eden** was centered on right praise, and Adam and Eve were tasked to multiply and be fruitful, Edenizing the whole world. What happened? Sin interrupted the project. In response, God chose Israel, called them to right worship centered on the **tabernacle first, then the temple**, and gave them the task to Israelize creation. But, it did not reach fulfillment—sin again entered the project. However, Israel was promised a Messiah who **would** fulfill that call. He would gather the tribes and cleanse the temple, restoring the right worship of Yaweh. Of course, this is accomplished by God himself in the incarnation, God in Christ taking on flesh in order to perfect the praise of the entire created order—in essence, Christifying the world.

We have the great privilege of engaging the world, telling the world its true story, and bringing it to the right worship of the only God who is ultimately true, good and beautiful. God wants right worship so **we** can be rightly ordered and sent on mission. This is why the focus on true worship is at the very core of the Christian faith, and why the study of worship is of supreme importance! The Bible is God's story of how he chooses and shapes a people with his heart and mind to praise him aright, to reverse that process of dis-integration, to re-integrate, to re-order our lives around Christ, and to go out on mission to participate in the reconciliation of creation. The content and structure of our worship simply summarizes the Biblical narrative where God's people are called to Edenize, to Israelize, to Christify, the entire created order.

So what is true worship? It is participation in that story of God's saving work in **Jesus the Christ**. It is the submission of humankind to God, to be cleansed, forgiven, changed into his likeness revealed in Christ through his word and table, and then sent into the world in mission with fire to love the world to the God who is perfect love, perfect truth, goodness and beauty.

Participation in the Gospel

Earlier, I described worship as “the participation of the people of God in the work of God.” This fall I preached in a chapel service at a Christian university where the chapels this year have been focused on a particular theme titled, “Because of Your Participation in the Gospel...” (from Phil. 1:5). I was assigned the difficult passage of 1 Cor. 10:14-22. The chapels have focused on the various uses of the word *koinonia* throughout the New Testament in an attempt to understand what it means to participate in the gospel. They have deconstructed the understanding of *koinonia* as simply Christian fellowship, or just hanging out with Christian friends. Rather, the New Testament usage of *koinonia* is much more substantial and purposeful, referring to such applications as communion with the Triune God, our participation in the sufferings of Christ and our partaking of the beatific vision. *Koinonia* or participation with God is at the very center of the Christian life as we are transformed into Christ-likeness (or as St. Peter wrote, we become partakers of the divine nature). Furthermore, our *koinonia* is made manifest in our gatherings with the Apostles' teaching, the fellowship, the breaking of bread and the prayers (Acts 2:42). And within those gatherings of worship we mysteriously participate in and partake of the body and blood of Jesus.

But what is participation? According to Webster it means “to participate, or take part in something.” Well *that’s* helpful, isn’t it? In business it means to invest financially as an owner in a company, enterprise or some financial venture. In politics it means to get involved with the government process or electoral process, usually as a volunteer. In philosophy, participation is the inverse of inherence. So an attribute inheres in a substance, but the substance participates in the attribute. So, the image of God inheres in us, and we are invited to therefore participate in God. Got it? No you don’t. I don’t even understand what I just said. It’s one of the great mysteries of God—He creates us in his image but gives us the dignity of freedom to participate in that life through Jesus Christ—or not to. The reality is, we do both.

So how do we participate or take part in something? It seems to me that there are varying levels of participation. Let me use an analogy. Look at the **Jacksonville Jaguars**. Now this is admittedly a flawed analogy, but here goes. The Jacksonville Jaguars is a business entity, and as a business entity, it has an owner, Shad Khan. The owner employs an administrative staff, a coaching staff, many trainers, doctors, PR people, etc. etc., and they employ football players, 53 of them (the NFL roster limit), with only 11 playing at one time, offense or defense or special teams. In terms of participation in the Jaguars football team, the owner obviously has the primary participation. He puts up the money, takes all of the risk and bears all of the responsibility for the team’s entertainment value. But do the administrators and the coaches participate in the Jaguars? You bet! If the Jags don’t win, they lose their jobs. What about the players, are they participants? Arguably, they may be the most important, or at least the most visibly important participants. But as Jerry Seinfeld once pointed out, it’s really the jersey the player wears that determines his loyalty. If **Blake Bortles**, the Jags quarterback, is traded tomorrow to the Dallas Cowboys and dons the Cowboy’s jersey, he no longer participates in the Jags. In fact, he goes from being a hero to being a zero in very short order, at least in Jacksonville. What about the fans who purchase season tickets? Are they participants too? Yes. If not for them, there wouldn’t be a team in Jacksonville very long. They are even called the 12th man. When the Jags win, the fans often pronounce, “We won!” Did they? Or are they just part of the 70,000 people in desperate need of exercise watching 22 players in desperate need of rest for 60 minutes? What about the folks like me who watch the game at home? Are we participants? I think so. After all, we kind of have to watch the commercials that partially pay for the game. But do we participate at the same level as those who buy the tickets and sit in the stands? No. Do the ticket holders participate at the same level as the players? Obviously not. Do the coaches and administrators participate at the same level as the owner? No. Here is another way of thinking about this. When Blake Bortles says to his wife, “I’m going to the game,” does it have the same level of participatory meaning than if I threw on a **Blake Bortles jersey** and say to my wife, “I’m going to the game!” Well, no.

Likewise, there are varying levels of participation in the life of the Triune God in the created order around us. The **beauty of mountains or plains** or rivers or oceans participates in the beauty of the Creator. Living things, plants and animals, also participate in God in their own mysterious and even glorious way. **My cat** actually reveals God to me sometimes in her playfulness and mysteriousness and even resourcefulness. (And she brings me little gifts, like dead lizards.) But humankind is the pinnacle of God’s creation, made in the image of God,

uniquely created with a heart that is restless until it rests in God, as St. Augustine wrote. So, we can see varying levels of participation in the life of the Triune God.

But how do we, made in God's image, increase or intensify our participation in the life of the Triune God? First, let me lay a bit of theological foundation for this idea of participation. (San Clemente Apse) We live in a world created freely by God from (what?) NOTHING! (CREATIO EX NIHILO) (Not Stephen Hawking nothing, but an ontological nothing.) In the great prologue to the Gospel of John we read, "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was with God in the beginning. Through him all things were made; without him nothing was made that has been made." (NIV) So God created everything that *is* *ex nihilo*, from nothing. Therefore everything that *is*, both in this world and in every universe or multiverse that exists, animate and inanimate, naturally occurring and man-made, is *necessarily* insinuated with the Creator.

But, he is also *other than* everything that exists. Everything that exists, exists because of God and finds its being in God. And, God is present to his creation, sustaining it and eternally *continuing to create*. Therefore, everything that exists participates in some way with God and the continuous creative process. That is a participatory, sacramental worldview, or more accurately, a participatory, sacramental metaphysic. The word "sacramental" means that God mysteriously participates in *his* created order as the created order mysteriously participates in God's loving continuous creation.

As I mentioned, there are differing degrees of participation. Let me give you a few examples. Is Jesus Christ fully God and fully man? Yes! But is he a mediation of the full glory of God? Heb. 1:3 says that Jesus is the refulgence, or brightness of God's glory and the express image of His person (a line that is repeated in the early liturgy of St. Basil the Great). In Christ, the *unapproachable* light of Divinity is *approachable* in the Incarnate Son. He is the perfect and eternal icon of the Father. Colossians 2:9 reads, "For in him the whole fullness of deity dwells bodily..." (or, mediated). Colossians 1:15 states, "He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation." So, Christ is the mediation of the unapproachable light of God, but yet fully divine—not subordinate to the Father.

What are the primary sacraments, or icons of Christ? First, the Church is the mystical Body of Christ, the continuing incarnation of Christ in the world. Next, the scriptures are also the icon of Christ, who is the Living Word of God himself.

The next level of participation brings us to I Cor. 10—the participation of bread and wine in the reality of the body and blood of Christ. I'll come back to that. In a wider, very true sense, all of creation participates in the divine life, since the entire created order contains the DNA if you will of the Creator. Everything that *is* finds its being in God, comes from God and ultimately returns to God in worship. Everything.

Now back to 1 Cor. 10:16-17. In his Sermon 227 St. Augustine wrote this referring to receiving the Body and Blood of Christ in bread and wine at Eucharist, "*If you receive them well, you are yourselves what you receive. You see, the apostle [Paul] says, We, being many, are one loaf, one body.*" (from 1 Cor. 10:17)." Dr. Hans Boersma explains the radicality of that statement

from Augustine: In partaking of the Eucharist, "...you become the body of Christ; you become what you eat." That's exactly how Alexander Schmemmann begins his great book, *For the Life of the World*: "You are what you eat." As we partake of the Eucharistic bread, the Body of Christ broken for the life of the world, we become the ecclesial bread, the Church, the mystical Body of Christ broken for the life of the world. Through the Eucharist, Christ, the Living Word, constitutes the Church, sends the Church on mission, and then the Church regathers to celebrate the Eucharist, which again constitutes the Church!

In the passage above St. Augustine referred to 1Cor. 10:16-17:

"Is not the cup of thanksgiving for which we give thanks a participation in the blood of Christ? And is not the bread that we break a participation in the body of Christ? Because there is one loaf, we, who are many, are one body, for we all share the one loaf."

Please notice--the word "body" occurs twice in this passage. The first time, it refers to the eucharistic body. ("[I]s not the bread that we break a participation in the body of Christ?" – Which refers to Jesus' words "This is my body" spoken over the bread at the Last Supper, right?) The second time, it refers to the ecclesial body. ("Because there is one loaf, we, who are many, are one body." –Which is the Church.) Of the **three bodies of Christ** frequently referred to in the Great Tradition (the historical physical body, the Eucharistic body, and the ecclesial body), St. Paul takes the last two and places them right beside each other; he links them together. He maintains that when, by faith, we partake in the one eucharistic body (the bread), the Spirit makes us one ecclesial body (the Church). As St. Augustine wrote, we become what we have received. **The Eucharist makes the Church and sends it on mission to be Christ to the world.** This koinonia, or participation, is a means of grace that allows the created order, and particularly humankind, to reach its appointed end: eternal participation, eternal feasting, in the gracious and generous gift of the divine life itself through Jesus Christ.

Now back to the question at hand—how do we increase or intensify our participation in the life of the Triune God? I have been involved with worship leadership for somewhere around 40 years. As I reflect on what it means to be formed in Christ and participating in the Gospel, I think it means exactly this: to fall more in love with God and with our neighbors, to be transformed by the renewing of our minds, to be divinized, to be formed into the virtues of Christ-likeness. That's it—that is the entire meaning of participation in Christ, and really the entirety of the Christian life. All else is commentary.

But, I confess to you, my brothers and sisters, I participate in life of God in Christ very unevenly. I consistently fall short. I am not as formed into Christ-like virtue as I want to be. But, I am also constantly reminded of the mercy and goodness of God in **JESUS CHRIST**, whose love is unending, who constantly calls me to himself to renew and reconcile me, and send me back on mission.

My doctoral thesis work at IWS was on a recovery of the **Daily Office** of prayer for my church (and, more to it, for myself). In one book I read, the author asked a monastic what it was like to pray the Psalms seven times a day, every day of the year, for many, many years. I thought the answer would be something like, "It's glorious to be constantly in the presence of God with my

Christian community in continual prayer.” Or perhaps something like the comment of Thomas Merton when he visited the Gethsemani Abbey for the first time: “I have found the still point around which the whole country revolves without knowing it.” I thought that would be how the monk would respond. But no. When asked about praying the Psalms all through the day he said, “It is relentless.” Relentless.

Being in the worship leadership for around 40 years, I understand how it can be relentless, every Sunday, every year, Christmas stress, Easter stress, on and on. Perhaps you may know how it is. (Life and ministry can be so daily.) My daughter Erika is an IWS grad. I mentioned to her one time recently that at times that relentlessness of ministry can affect my motivation to go back every week. She said to me, “Dad, you don’t go for you. You go for the life of the world.”

Oh yeah. Then there’s that. The life of the world. St. John wrote the words of Jesus as he proclaimed, “I am the living bread that came down from heaven. Whoever eats of this bread will live forever; and the bread that I will give for the life of the world is my flesh.”

Do you want to increase or intensify your participation in the life of God? Then fall in love with God by being a regular communicant, or recipient of Christ’s body and blood in bread and wine (as often as you can!). As you participate in this supernal gift, you **become**. You become a sacrificial gift. You become Christ-like, you become Christ’s body to the world, you become Christ to the world, Christifying the cosmos.

CHRIST ON THE CROSS

Why relentlessly gather to worship in Word and Table every week? Why allow yourselves to be transformed into Christlike virtue? Why fall in love with God and our brothers and sisters? Why? To become once again the Body of Christ, broken and poured out for the life of the world. For the life of the world.

Welcome to this most useless, but supremely important task—the worship of God the Father, through God the Son, in God the Holy Spirit.

In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit.



How do you approach God in prayer with boldness or fear?

What's the most "bold ask" you've made of God?

Are your prayers more petitions for yourself or more intercession for others?

How do you think Jesus was able to sleep in the storm?

If Jesus stood up in the boat of your life today and said "Peace, be still, what would he be addressing?

What can you do to build faith that believes he can do that?

How hard is it for you to believe God wants to answer you?

Why do you think Jesus granted the bold ask of the demoniacs?

Why is it so easy to value things and less easy to value messy people?

Who needs to hear your story of what Jesus has done for you and what will it take for you to tell it?

What will be your next "bold ask" of God?



Join the conversation at [@FloridaHC](https://twitter.com/FloridaHC) [#fhcTAKEAWAY](https://twitter.com/fhcTAKEAWAY).
Sermon archives are available at hospitalchurch.org.