

The Church

Awe At The Lord's Supper - Those Who Handled The Body Of The Lord

Readings

Isaiah 52:11
1 Corinthians 11:23-29

Introduction

Every Sunday morning thousands of saints around the world meet "to remember the Lord". There are those thousands of others who meet monthly, quarterly or yearly, but which ever, certain things are constant. There is always a plate with bread, leavened or unleavened is irrelevant for this discussion, a cup of wine or grape juice, and again whether it is a single cup, two cups, or several individual cups, is not under consideration here. It is my understanding that there is something vastly more important than these considerations. It is the lack of reverence and evident lack of self examination prior to the partaking of the holy symbols. Putting it more bluntly, the sloppy way this holy privilege is approached.

Isaiah speaks very clearly, "Be ye clean, that bear (carry) the vessels of the LORD" (Isa. 52:11). God had given a law that the priest's hands had to be washed at the laver (Ex. 30:19, 21). To have semi washed them, that is, in a casual nonchalant way or to have approached the holy place without doing so would have been an invitation to the judgment of God. The Psalmist caught the solemnity of approaching God when he penned the question, "Who shall ascend into the hill of the LORD? or who shall stand in his holy place?" Then he gave the answer, "He that hath clean hands, and a pure heart; who hath not lifted up his soul unto vanity, nor sworn deceitfully" (Psa. 24:3, 4). Continuing the same contemplation, the Spirit of God caused Paul to write, "But let a man examine himself, and so let him eat of that bread, and drink of that cup" (1 Cor. 11:28).

Recently I was at a funeral and at the front of the room there was a casket with the body of the deceased. I watched as folk came in. There was a quietness and respect for the situation. To have done otherwise, i.e. folk talking loudly, laughing etc., would have shown a lack of appreciation for the solemnity of the situation. They would not have been discerning the body. Paul, by the Spirit, makes it clear that eating and drinking unworthily indicates such and is not discerning the Lord's body (1 Cor. 11:29). Surely God expects those who gather to remember His Son show the same discernment. No doubt the greatest illustration by which we can consider handling the sacred emblems is from those who handled the actual body of the Lord during His earthly sojourn. They are traceable along three avenues which are:

- a) Those who handled His body before His death
- b) Those who handled His body in death
- c) Those who handled His body in resurrection

Those Who Handled Him Before His Death

1) Simeon (Lk. 2:25-32)

- a) The expression, "Then took he Him up in his arms" (Lk. 2:28). One can visualize the tenderness exhibited by Mary as she hands her little one week old baby to this elderly priest, and with what adoration elderly Simeon would have looked on this little baby of a few pounds weight. For him it was an experience that was the thrill of a lifetime for, in his arms he held and looked upon He who had been revealed to him by the Holy Ghost (Lk. 2:26). It was actually happening. This was that moment and he would have reveled in each second of it. As he would have circumcised the baby, and as the truths flashed through his mind of that which lay ahead (Lk. 2:31-35), I am sure his old hands trembled as he realized with excitement and wonder, "This is the Lord's Christ". We never read of the shepherds or the wise men taking Him up in their arms. What sort of a man was He to be given this honour? He was, "just and devout, waiting for the consolation of Israel" (Lk. 2:25). From the wording, he would appear to me to be a man who, by his presence, demanded reverence, respect, and awe. How ought we to take in our hands, and for a few seconds hold that which symbolizes the Lord's body?

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- 2) Indirectly, those who touched the hem of His garment.
- a) It is recorded that this happened on two occasions, once with the woman (Matt. 9:20), and the other was by the people (Matt. 14:36). What a difference there is in the comings to touch His garment. The woman came behind Him in secret, the others came in openness. In both cases the individuals were "made whole".
 - b) How did the Lord respond to the situations?
 - i) With the woman, she had to tell what had happened (Mk. 5:31-34), a matter which was unnecessary. When those who brought the sick to touch His garment, all could see they were healed. This could not be seen by those around the lady.
 - ii) With regard to the woman, the Lord encouraged her because of her faith but said nothing to the others of their faith. She evidently had very little confidence in her faith and so it is encouraged. The men of the city had full confidence in Him, their faith was strong. With the woman, we see the Lord "blowing" on the smoking flax to cause it to burn brightly (Isa. 42:3). Only the Lord knows how many times I have gone to the Lord's Supper deeply aware of personal sin and guilt and burdened with unworthiness, then to come as near as I can and feel His power and love and know, "I am made whole", or enabled to burn brightly again.

Those Who Handled Him In Death

Joseph of Arimathaea and Nicodemus

What a sacred honour was placed on these men. They were foreshadowed in the Old Testament by the "clean man" who carried the ashes of the sacrifice (Num. 19:9). The Holy Spirit has it recorded concerning Joseph that he was, "a good man and just, who waited for the kingdom of God" (Mk. 15:43). Nicodemus came to Jesus by night (Jn. 3:2). These were men of high character, for apart from the description given of Joseph, Nicodemus was a ruler of the Jews (Jn. 3:1). After Joseph had begged and was given permission to take the body of the Lord (Matt. 27:58-59), it states, "he took it down" (Lk. 23:53) and "wrapped it in a clean linen cloth" (Matt. 27:59). Nicodemus provided approximately one hundred pounds in weight of myrrh and aloes (Jn. 19:39). Having done that, then His holy body was placed in a new tomb. We can be sure that there was no frivolity, no casualness, no disrespect shown in the slightest degree. Utmost affection and tender hearted hands would have extracted the nails from His hands and feet, taken Him down from the cross, and performed the necessary duties of wrapping Him in the grave-clothes. I am sure that there would have been lingering looks at His stone cold face before the napkin was placed over His head.

- a) Just because that which I handle on a Sunday morning with the bread and cup are only symbols, does that mean they can be handled carelessly? At many investitures etc., individuals are given symbols of authority, does that symbol mean nothing? As I take in my hands the sacred emblems, I must remember I am not partaking of a piece of bread, nor drinking the cup the same as if I was at home. These are holy emblems of the body and blood of the Lord, and must be given due respect.

Those Who Indirectly Handled The Lord

The soldier whose weapon pierced His side and the one who did not break His legs

These men did not directly touch the sacred body, yet unwittingly they fulfilled the ancient scriptures.

- a) The soldier who did not break His legs.
 - i) Unwittingly, this individual declared the righteousness of the Lord, for the ancient Psalmist David wrote, "The righteous . . . He (God) keepeth all his bones: not one of them is broken." (Psa. 34:19-20).
 - ii) He also, without knowledge, fulfilled the ancient picture of the sacrificial lamb (Ex. 12:46). John tells how this was fulfilled (Jn. 19:36).

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- b) The soldier who pierced His side (Jn. 19:34).
 - i) This man did not realize he was being used by God to fulfill the scriptures and lay the foundation for a future fulfillment. The prophecy being fulfilled was, "And I will pour upon the house of David, and upon the inhabitants of Jerusalem, the spirit of grace and of supplications: and they shall look upon me whom they have pierced, and they shall mourn for him, as one mourneth for his only son, and shall be in bitterness for him, as one that is in bitterness for his firstborn" (Zech. 12:10). "But one of the soldiers with a spear pierced his side, and forthwith came there out blood and water" (Jn. 19:34).

Concluding Thoughts

What do I see in these illustrations?

- a) From those who were the Lord's, utmost reverence and respect
- b) By those who were unsaved, indifference and mere functioning void of any affection.

The question I must ask myself is, "How do I handle the holy emblems? Like one who loved the Lord, those who used the Lord, or those who merely functioned?"

**May God grant us good understanding as He, by His Holy Spirit, deigns to guide us into all truth.
John 16:13**

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