Dear Eucharistic Ministers (clergy and lay),

I am grateful for your ministry as liturgical leaders in this wonderful community of Saint Mark's Cathedral, and I extend a special call to each of you, as leaders, to the observance of a Holy Lent, which begins February 14 with Ash Wednesday. How we engage this season in particular informs not just our personal piety, but the theological underpinnings of the community and how it embraces the weighty meaning of our Lenten journey.

Once again, I'd like to ask each of us—priests, deacons and lay—who serve in our respective licensed roles around the table, to use the following words when you deliver bread or wine during Lent:

The Blood of our Lord Jesus Christ keep you in everlasting life .

(Book of Common Prayer, p. 365 or 338)

Or an alternative, especially at 8am, but welcome at the 9am and 11am, if you so choose:

The Blood of our Lord Jesus Christ, which was shed for you, preserve your body and soul unto everlasting life. Drink this in remembrance that Christ's Blood was shed for you, and be thankful.

(Book of Common Prayer, p. 338)

I am asking each of us to change during this Season of Lent from using the usual (*Blood of Christ, cup of salvation*).

As I've shared in prior years, here are my reasons for asking us all to make these changes.

Rationale:



I long for this community to experience and embrace the fullness of our liturgical calendar and its role in shaping our lives, and I know many do "live" the calendar already. Our role liturgically is to invite all whom we serve into this experience.

Lent is beautiful, in a raw sort of way. Its music is melancholic or mournful or solemn by design. Lent is deeply meaningful for

many of us, but it is not designed to be "happy" or a "favorite." It is desert time, a wilderness experience, which invites us to open ourselves to our deepest fears and discomforts, so that we might embrace the glory of Easter all the more in light of the stark reality of Lent.

I think something as simple as the words we offer while folks receive the bread and wine afford us an opportunity to gently nudge us from our casual or even comfortable routine.

A Brief Theological Reflection

I know the language of "Christ dying for us," or "Christ's blood shed for us," is extremely unsettling to many of us, perhaps mostly because some fundamental Christians have co-opted it to mean specifically that Christ's death was a substitutionary atonement for our sins (Jesus died for my sins). That is a modern development, and it sets up a belief in a God that, in my estimation, shortchanges the full range of theological meaning of Christological sacrifice.

But this is not what these words from our BCP Eucharist rites mean. There is a range of theology around atonement and sacrifice, which predates Christ, and into which Jesus and early Church stepped with careful intention. As Anglicans, we take our place in the long legacy of holding the view that Christ's death and resurrection mean many things, all at the same time, and one of those is that it was a sacrificial act of love for all of us…which is exactly why I say these words during Lent. The words jolt me from the doldrums of normalcy, allowing me to more fully engage Lent, uncomfortable as that is at times.

And so I invite you to join me in using these words of our tradition—these weighty theological words—as we walk the way of the cross this Lent. It is important work that we do, and we should engage it with great intention, knowing why we do what we do at every turn.



A Slight Digression

I understand that in prior years some have had questions about the two variants of words for distribution of communion in Lent, and the motivations behind our using them.

It is appropriate and very natural to say the words while administering the cup to one person: *The Body (Blood) of our Lord Jesus Christ keep you in everlasting life.* (BCP, pg. 365, or 338)

The alternative: *The Blood of our Lord Jesus Christ, which was shed for you, preserve your body and soul unto everlasting life. Drink this in remembrance that Christ's Blood was shed for you, and be*

thankful. (BCP, pg 338) is by tradition said as the minister moves along the row of communicants. It stems from the late 16th Century and the Elizabethan Compromise in which the theological statements of both catholic (drink the blood) and protestant (in remembrance) are combined in the statement. Undergirding this is a gentle reminder that no one receives communion alone, and we do not communicate individuals, but the people of God who gather for that holy meal. This is why we use the common bread and common cup.

No one is obligated to use the longer alternative if that seems uncomfortable to them. Just say "The Blood of our Lord Jesus Christ keep you in everlasting life" to each person.

There is no impatient motive here...but if this all places you out of a certain space of comfort, then I might encourage you to consider it part of the Lenten challenge to being not in your usual comfort zone.

Happy to answer more questions.

Again, I am deeply grateful for your ministry and presence here, and for the privilege to serve in your midst.

Blessings and peace,
Steve+

The Very Rev. Steven L. Thomason
Dean and Rector
Saint Mark's Episcopal Cathedral
1245 10th Avenue East
Seattle, WA 98102
(206) 323-0300 x 222
sthomason@saintmarks.org