

Devotion on Hymns of the Church (Hymn 198 – Oh God, Unseen, Yet Ever Near) – 20 October 2015, Anno Domini (In the Year of our Lord)



¹² Giving thanks unto the Father, which hath made us meet to be partakers of the inheritance of the saints in light: ¹³ Who hath delivered us from the power of darkness, and hath translated us into the kingdom of his dear Son: ¹⁴ In whom we have redemption through his blood, even the forgiveness of sins: ¹⁵ Who is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of every creature: ¹⁶ For by him were all things created, that are in heaven, and that are in earth, visible and invisible, whether they be thrones, or dominions, or principalities, or powers: all things were created by him, and for him: ¹⁷ And he is before all things, and by him all things consist. ¹⁸ And he is the head of the body, the church: who is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead; that in all things he might have the preeminence. (Col 1:12-18)

*¹⁹ And he took bread, and gave thanks, and brake it, and gave unto them, saying, **This is my body which is given for you: this do in remembrance of me.** ²⁰ Likewise also the cup after supper, saying, **This cup is the new testament in my blood, which is shed for you.** (Luke 22:19-20)*

This Communion hymn reminds us of the ever Presence of Christ with the believer, and most emphatically so during the Service at the Lord's Table at Holy Communion. Lyrics are by Edward Osley, 1836, and the tune is St. Flavian, 1563. My mother favorite tune was an alternate Irish tune published in Dublin, Ireland in 1749.

O God, Unseen, Yet Ever Near

O God, unseen yet ever near,
thy presence may we feel;
and thus inspired with holy fear,
before thine altar kneel.

Here may thy faithful people know
the blessings of thy love,
the streams that through the desert flow,
the manna from above.

We come, obedient to thy word,
to feast on heavenly food;
our meat the body of the Lord,
our drink his precious blood.

Thus may we all thy Word obey,
for we, O God, are thine;
and go rejoicing on our way,
renewed with strength divine.

O God, unseen yet ever near, thy presence may we feel; and thus inspired with holy fear, before thine altar kneel. In the Anglican Church of the Reformation (which church we are in the AOC) there is no altar before which to kneel - only the Lord's Table as the Book of Common Prayer clearly stipulates. An altar is for the killing of the sacrifice, but Christ died once and for all for our sins, and we do not 'sacrifice' Him again as do the Roman Catholics. Moreover, we do not have a cross on our Lord's Table with Christ still on it, for He arose from the dead and is no longer on that rugged old cross. We feel the presence at all times of Christ with us, but He is with us in a particularly strong and meaningful way at the partaking of Bread and Wine of Communion. It represents the essence of our redemption. Our Lord's Table is centrally located, and the pulpits are offset from center. Why is this so? It is because the central place in our worship is always Christ and not man. The Holy fear that we should feel at the Lord's Table is not a fear unto death, but a fear unto LIFE, for He is our Lord, our King, our God, and our Father; and good children are always fearful to dishonor or disobey their loving father.

In the elements of Bread and Wine, we comprehend the Body and Blood of our Lord and Savior. The BREAD (Body) is that physical manifestation that we have of Christ that teaches us of Him and His Nature - it is His WORD from beginning to end - Alpha and Omega, and every letter in between. The Bread is whole Bread and no leavened for He was without sin, and we are all part of that Bread at Communion. And the WINE (Blood) represents His purchase of our salvation. It is the LIFE of the Church and of its people. It is the SPIRITUAL nourishment that perpetuates our being. As wine warms the heart and lifts the spirits, so does the Spirit of Christ make alive and renew our souls in joy and hope. *Here may thy faithful people know the blessings of thy love, the streams that through the desert flow, the manna from above.* Jesus is like the Jordan River. He flows through the wilderness areas bringing green belts of life wherever His healing waters flow. He brings life and the Bread of Heaven (which Bread He is) every place He goes. Even in times when we do not know His Presence, we may FEEL it right by our sides. Remember the two men on the Road to Emmaus on the Sunday of the Lord's resurrection? He walked and talked with these men during the journey, but they did not KNOW Him until He divided the Bread to them in their own house. ³⁰ *And it came to pass, as he sat at meat with them, he took bread, and blessed it, and brake, and gave to them.* ³¹ *And their eyes were opened, and they knew him; and he vanished out of their sight.* ³² *And they said one to another, Did not our heart burn within us, while he talked with us by the way, and while he opened to us the scriptures?* (Luke 24:30-32)

We come, obedient to thy word, to feast on heavenly food; our meat the body of the Lord, our drink his precious blood. Our moments of repentance should be most humble made before the partaking of the Lord's Supper because it is that time when our feet approach most completely the Holy ground before the Table of the Lord. We honor our Lord with our love and obedience; but if we harbor hatred toward a brother or

sister, or secret sins in our hearts, we dishonor the Majesty of High, and we bring heapings of disgrace upon our own souls. ²⁶For as often as ye eat this bread, and drink this cup, ye do shew the Lord's death till he come. ²⁷Wherefore whosoever shall eat this bread, and drink this cup of the Lord, unworthily, shall be guilty of the body and blood of the Lord. ²⁸But let a man examine himself, and so let him eat of that bread, and drink of that cup. ²⁹For he that eateth and drinketh unworthily, eateth and drinketh damnation to himself, not discerning the Lord's body. ³⁰For this cause many are weak and sickly among you, and many sleep. (1 Cor 11:26-30)

Thus may we all thy Word obey, for we, O God, are thine; and go rejoicing on our way, renewed with strength divine. Do you remember that Jesus told Peter, *And I say also unto thee, That thou art Peter, and upon this rock I will build my church; and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it.* (Matt 16:18) In this passage, the name 'Peter (petros)' means a stone, or small rock; but the term Jesus for the Rock (Petras) upon which the Church is built is Large ROCK. Peter would be a stone cut from the large Rock that is Christ - just as are we all who believe and obey. ¹Moreover, brethren, I would not that ye should be ignorant, how that all our fathers were under the cloud, and all passed through the sea; ²And were all baptized unto Moses in the cloud and in the sea; ³And did all eat the same spiritual meat; ⁴And did all drink the same spiritual drink: for they drank of that spiritual Rock that followed them: and that Rock was Christ. (1 Cor 10:1-4) We are all stones from the Rock that is Christ or, as they say in Tennessee, chips off the old block. We should approve that which Christ approves, and reject that which Christ rejects. All of our old free wills (wills in bondage to sin) must be replaced with His Will (true Liberty in Christ). The love of Christ puts a song and a melody in the heart of the believer that needs no instrument or orchestra to perform. ⁶I call to remembrance my song in the night: I commune with mine own heart. (Psalm 77:6) *Ye shall have a song, as in the night when a holy solemnity is kept; and gladness of heart, as when one goeth with a pipe to come into the mountain of the LORD, to the mighty One of Israel.* (Isaiah 30:29) We rejoice at sundry times that the world cannot comprehend - while walking, driving, sitting by the fire, beholding the natural beauty of a baby or a rock-crowned mountain - all things are beautiful to the eyes of the believer, for God has placed beauty in them to behold beauty. *Deep calleth unto deep at the noise of thy waterspouts: all thy waves and thy billows.* (Psalms 42:7a)

The Lord renews our strength as an old eagle whose feathers are replenished with new and shining feathers. We mount up as the eagle, and we soar in the power, and upon the winds, of God's spirit. Have you known that power, my friends?