

Sermon for Proper 28, Year B

The Text: Hebrews 10:19-25

An elderly woman, who was completely deaf, attended church every week unless she was ill. Her pastor said to her one day, "Do give me the secret of your loyalty to God's House." She answered, *"Even though I can't hear one word you say, I love God's House and the fellowship of God's children. When in His House, I feel that I am in direct touch with God. I know the Saviour is meeting with us. It is not enough for me to worship God alone at home. It is my duty and privilege to worship Him publicly in the Church service."* We thank God for the loyalty and faithfulness of Christians like her. It is believers like her who are an example to everyone else. She took seriously God's plea to us in today's text to be in the habit of regular worship, in view of the fact that we are accountable to God for what we do.

In the Bible the people there express a joyous enthusiasm about worshipping God. Psalm 95:2 expresses their attitude so well: "Let us come into the Lord's presence with thanksgiving; let us make a joyful noise to God with songs of praise." The letter to the Hebrews invites us to share this attitude. It was written by a Christian to whom the worship of God meant everything. This letter tells us that the very desire to worship and adore God is a priceless expression of faith.

There's no truer expression of trust in God than worship. Luther said "To believe God is to worship God." Faith breathes worship because regular participation in the Divine Services of the Church strengthens our faith, filling it with energy and vitality. Today's second reading, our text, is the climax to everything that's been said so far in Hebrews chapters one to nine, concerning all the wonderful things Jesus has done and is still doing for us. We're rarely given unrestricted access to our political leaders, but the letter to the Hebrews is excited about the fact that through our Lord Jesus, we now have unrestricted access to God the Father. This letter can't praise too highly the eternal life we have through Jesus' sacrifice of His own life for us.

It emphasizes that worship is about what we receive from Jesus rather than what we do. In our worship, Jesus and the Holy Spirit take action. Just when we're giving ourselves most earnestly in our worship, the Holy Spirit is doing His most wonderful work within us. We read in Romans 8:15-16, "When we cry, 'Abba! Father!' it is that very Spirit bearing witness with our spirit that we are children of God."

People sometimes say, "I don't get a lot out of worship." As if life's only about "getting"! As well as coming here to receive our Lord's life-saving, life-transforming gift, we come to God's House to give each other love, affirmation and encouragement. We can only receive Jesus our Saviour by giving ourselves to Him,

and we can only give ourselves to Jesus by receiving Him and all He does in our lives. In our Sunday worship, we receive the priceless privilege of thanking God for all He's given to us. Our participation in public worship is a public expression of how much God means to us and how much we love Him. Worshipping together with fellow believers uplifts and changes us in ways that rarely happen when we worship God on our own. Martin Luther felt this strongly. He said, "At home in my own house there is no warmth or vigour in me, but in the Church when the multitude is gathered together, a fire is kindled in my heart."

In our worship, Jesus comes to cleanse our consciences and act as our Advocate as He presents us to God and intercedes for us. He sympathises with us in our weaknesses and offers each of us help tailor-made to our unique needs. The greater our need, the purer our worship will be. Jesus' invitation "Come to me, all of you who are tired from carrying your heavy loads, and I will give you rest" is an invitation to come to the Lord's Table and leave our burdens there with Him. Holy Communion appeals to our senses: we hear those welcome words of Jesus, "Given and shed for you" as we taste His forgiveness in the gifts we touch and see: the consecrated bread and wine.

Like our eating of meals each week, the impact of Holy Communion is cumulative. Do you remember every meal you ate this year? Of course not. And yet they all helped sustain and keep you alive.

In Holy Communion, Jesus gives Himself to us for our temporal blessing and eternal benefit. So then, much more happens in our Sunday services than we see on the surface. Worship establishes a vital connection between Christ and us. Our attitude to weekly worship reveals how indispensable our Lord is in our daily lives. Worship is the test of whether Jesus is a living, life-giving reality for us and not just a nice idea. Where God is truly known, God is worshipped and adored. You cannot really know God personally without wanting to worship and adore Him as often as possible. No wonder the Archbishop of Canterbury has referred to our worship as the only means we have of saving a sinking world.

Worship sustains our relationship with God like no other activity can, as it releases God's power into our lives, giving us new power to do God's will in the week ahead. Worship creates in us a passionate desire to be Christ-centred and other-centred, rather than self-centred. Here, as nowhere else in our society, our sinful attitudes, prejudices and habits are challenged, called into question and condemned for their unworthiness. That's why the confession and repentance of our sins is so important in our weekly worship. What's more, heaven rejoices when we repent of all our sins of thought, word and deed. Jesus says, "There's joy in the presence of the angels of God over one sinner who repents (Luke 15:10)." We can repent with joy because we have a God who is eager to forgive us and welcome us back into His presence. "Do you not realize that God's kindness is meant to lead you to repentance (Romans 2:4)?"

Our regular presence in God's House is an encouragement to everyone else who worships here also. Greet each other with words like "It's great being with you here today. I look forward to doing the same again next Sunday." To live Christlike lives in today's increasingly non-religious community, we need all the support and help we can get from each other as we remember and support each other in our prayers. We worship God also for the benefit of others, including those not here today or who have drifted away from God. Rather than being critical about their absence, ask God to bless, guide and protect them. Our church thrives when every member contributes to its well-being. We all need each other more than we think we do. To pray for someone is to bring them into God's presence. Our worship seeks to "Bind us together with cords that cannot be broken." "Welcome one another, therefore, just as Christ has welcomed you, for the glory of God (Romans 15:7)."

In summary now, here are ten reasons for regularly going to worship, for you to pray and meditate on:

- 1: To believe in God is to worship God (see John 9:35-38);
- 2: The most important part of worship is what God gives to us: His forgiveness, grace, love and blessing, and His message to us;
- 3: What we get out of worshipping God is the inestimable privilege of focussing on God for an hour, honouring our Creator and thanking Him for all the blessings we've received from Him;
- 4: In worship, we hear of God's undeserved love for us. Participating in worship is how we show our love for God;
- 5: Worship fulfils the First Commandment: "I am the Lord your God. Do not have any other God except Me." This means we should fear, love and trust God more than anything else.
- 6: Worship involves mystery – God is doing wonderful things in people's hearts and minds that we cannot see;
- 7: Worship is faith in action. In worship we come to please God and acknowledge His infinite worth and value;
- 8: We worship for the sake of others, so that they too may benefit from the blessings we receive in worship;
- 9: Worship helps us keep God at the centre of all we do;
- 10: We come to worship with a desire to be changed by God as we worship. We leave eager to put into practice what we have learned.

All our worship here is but "a foretaste of the feast to come." We're rehearsing for the greatest celebration of worship ever, when face to face with angels and archangels and with all the company of heaven, we will worship and adore our triune God forevermore. We look forward with eager anticipation to that time when every creature in heaven and earth will sing "To the One seated on the throne and to the Lamb be blessing and honour and glory and might forever and ever!" Amen.