

## **UBI CARITAS ET AMOR, DEUS IBI EST**

Augsburg College  
All Saints Day, November 1, 2006

Song of Songs 8: 6-7  
Luke 22: 19-20 (RSV)

In the liturgy of the Christian church, the ritual of sharing bread and wine, consecrated as the body and blood of Jesus Christ, begins with the Thanksgiving – and there is good reason for that – reason that has special meaning for our celebration of All Saints Day.

I once served a church – a small, Swedish Lutheran church, where I was called as interim pastor perhaps so there would be a pastor to help celebrate the lives of its senior members as they passed away – and celebrate I did!

The last time I saw Betty was when I visited her hospital room to bring her communion. It had been a rough week for Betty, but she very much wanted to share the Lord's Supper and experience the connection back to her friends at First Lutheran in Attica – the connection that God's grace makes possible in our sharing at table. She missed her friends so very much.

So, I did my pastoral duties – consecrated the bread and wine, and then shared with Betty and her daughter the bread, Christ's body, in remembrance of his sacrifice for us. And then I passed the cup – the blood of Christ shed for us. Betty's daughter took her sip and passed the cup to her mother. And we both watched with some amazement as Betty proceeded to "chug" most of the wine in the cup.

We finished the service, said our prayers, and as I took my leave Betty managed this wonderful smile, even in the midst of the

obvious pain she was suffering. Outside the room, Betty's daughter and I had a good laugh at Betty's clear joy in partaking of the wine. It had been a long spell since she had enjoyed her traditional evening cocktail. We rejoiced in the smile our fellowship had occasioned. It had been too long since Betty had reason to smile.

It was a moment of grace for all of us and I often remember that moment because of what I learned from Betty. Despite her pain, Betty got it, she understood, she believed that the wonderful thing about being a Christian was that it meant she had been saved so that she could enjoy life to the fullest – as God intended for her. When she took the cup of wine in her hands, she thought to herself, "Here is the blood of Christ, shed for me and for all people, for the forgiveness of sin. I'm going to take a big swig because Christ died for me. I believe that." But she also thought, "Here is some decent fruit of the vine, the fruit of God's great creation, and because I have been saved I get to enjoy this. I've been cooped up here too long and I need to enjoy some of the pleasures of life." The blood of Christ and the love of life – what remarkable gifts. Drink it up!

And that is why we call it thanksgiving, this liturgical act of sharing bread and wine at table. Here is fellowship, here are gifts from God for God's people, here is life abundant, and here is fun and joy and grace for all people. Here is the communion of saints.

One of my favorite Latin texts is: *Ubi caritas et amor, Deus ibi est* (Where love and charity prevail, there we find God) – the words capture the essence of my time with Betty and all faithful people whose lives have touched ours and who now are here in spirit only

People often ask why I became a college president. I tell them that I read the morning newspapers, see how much hate and hopelessness there is in the world, and realize how much the world needs people like those whose lives we mark and celebrate this morning, people

who have been part of the Augsburg community. I see the desolation and anxiety that the world has always known (the travails of Zion) and I know how much God wants us to remember the call to love and charity, God's call to be the communion of saints

So what are the marks, the seals, upon these saints we celebrate today, those people who have come before us to set a path?

People of faith, not necessarily our particular, sectarian faith – but surely a faith in the fact that we can't do it alone, that we don't know it all, that the world is full of abundance and promise for those with the resolve and imagination to stay with it - people who believe enough to fight for what they believe in...people of faith who know that love and charity are at the heart of living life to the fullest

People who hope, people whose horizon, while grounded in the travails of Zion, still hear the whispers and see the glimpses of a higher purpose, a new world, the kingdom of God – people for whom hope means that we take the gifts we are given and use them well in service of that better world – people who have plenty of evidence to give up, but never did, and who made the world a better place for all of us

People who love – in our bifurcated world, there are many uncomfortable with the language of love – it belongs in the private sphere, they claim, not in public – but we say no, love is the language of citizenship in the world, it is the language of strong families and communities, it is the language of creation – for it is love alone that is stronger than death, love alone that can overcome the hate – set me as a seal upon your heart, the lyricist write, as a shield upon your arm – those who have come before us in this place have made their ways in the world as people who love and there they have found God...

Today we remember the saints like Betty, people of faith and hope and love upon whose shoulders we now stand – even as we celebrate their lives, we look to those who will come to take their places, those who understand that where love and charity prevail, there God is....

May each of us who has the privilege to be a part of this community and to know (and have known) these people of faith and hope and love honor them by modeling our lives in their paths – and in that way we too will find God in the work of love and charity, we will join in the communion of saints. *Ubi caritas et amor, Deus ibi est.* Thanks be to God. Amen.