

"A SACRAMENT OF STRENGTH"

INTRODUCTION A little later on in the service this morning, most of you will come forward to the altar, and kneeling be given something. You will be given a tiny piece of bread and a small cup of grape juice - food and drink of the most basic and elemental variety. These are not among the delicacies of life, but rather the necessities. And nothing, I think, could give a more accurate clue to the nature of our religion than this, for Christianity is a religion which by its very nature is bound to the ground. That is to say - it deals with basic and fundamental needs.

However, in order for us to fully appreciate what it means when we come forward to receive the bread and the grape juice, we need to know something about the event in history that inspired this celebration, this observance that today is being held in Christian Churches around the world.

DEVELOPMENT It all happened on a Thursday night some nineteen hundred years ago in the city of Jerusalem, in an upper room, plain and barely furnished, a room borrowed by a group of young Jewish men who were in the city for the Jewish Holy Days. The leader of this closely knit fellowship was a young man, about thirty-three years of age, whose name was Jesus. They were having a meal together; several of them sensed that this would probably be their last meal together. When it was over, Jesus rose and took a piece of bread, broke it, and gave it to them with the words, "Take, eat, this is my body". Then he reached for the cup, and after he had given thanks, he gave it to them saying, "This is my blood, which is shed for many. Take it, drink it." The disciples that night understood what he meant and what he was doing. They knew that he was leaving behind with them a memorial of himself. They knew that by this time the following night he would be dead, put to death on a cross. The broken bread was a little token that would symbolize for all time the essential character of his life, his teachings, and so keep him ever in the minds of men. He had written no books, founded no church, appointed no successor. But in this simple ceremony, he summed up beautifully and concretely what he stood for, and trusted that to work when he was gone from their midst. It was a memorial, symbolizing sacrificial love. "This do" he said, "in remembrance of me". This Holy Communion service is symbolic through and through. It is a concrete and dramatic way of remembering Jesus - the sort of man he was, how he lived and died, and one big thing for which he stood.

THE NEXT STEP Yes - it is symbolic, but it is even more than that. Symbols, you see, are dynamic things; they help to energize a man's spirit. A great religious interpreter of our time once said that he kissed his child because he loved her, and that he kissed her because he wanted to love her more. He was a realist. Love has its tangible symbols; and when one neglects them, the sentiment itself is apt to die. Our nation has its share of symbols: flags, anthems, emblems, statues, monuments, tombs of great men - all calculated to inspire and sustain the feeling of