

Communion Meditation  
Duke University Chapel  
Sunday morning, January 12, 1947  
By Frank S. Hickman

#### PRACTICAL NATURE OF HOLY COMMUNION

We are sometimes told that the Christian Communion Service is too mystical and symbolic to be of interest to practically minded people. I should like to bring to your attention the fact that quite the opposite is true. Just now I have in mind the practical nature of Holy Communion. This comes out clearly in the wording of the invitation to commune.

In the familiar old words of the Anglican Communion service, which have been used by other churches as well the people hear this exhortation: "Ye who do truly and earnestly repent of your sins, and are in love and charity with your neighbours, and intend to lead a new life, following the commandments of God, and walking from henceforth in his holy ways: draw near with faith, and take this holy Sacrament to your comfort; and make your humble confession to Almighty God."

This invitation is based squarely upon the practical consideration that each person partaking in the Communion shall take an honest attitude toward his own spiritual condition, and show genuine repentance for sins which he has committed.

Then comes the further practical appeal for right relations with his fellow men. In one sense, of course, a right relationship with God is the Christian's primary obligation. But in another sense his right relationship with his fellow men is a prime condition of right living with God the Father of all mankind.

Here let me recall an incident that occurred in a small town church which I once served. Two merchants connected with that church had become embittered against each other over a business matter; and a kind of feud developed between them. One of these men was a cold, hard, unemotional

person, and harshly vindictive. The other was a hot-blooded, high tempered man, with a great capacity for both generous affection and violent resentment of what he considered unfair dealing. These two men came to the Communion altar one Sunday morning, in response to this very invitation which I have read in your hearing. When they arose from the altar, the generous man saw the absurdity of Christian men partaking of the elements representing Christ's death for the sins of men when the communicant was still harboring a bitter grudge against his neighbor. So, being a forthright man, he stepped over to where the cold natured man stood and offered his hand to him in the sight of the whole congregation. The latter, with the taste of the communion elements still in his mouth, scornfully refused the proffered hand, and went haughtily back to his seat. The whole town buzzed with that incident, and told it long afterward.

There is still a third practical element in the Holy Communion, indicated in this invitation. "Take this holy Sacrament to your comfort." Where does human comfort of spirit lie? In possessions and power over one's fellow men? Certainly not. Comfort of spirit always rises out of right personal relationships: the interweaving of human lives, interests, affections, and commendations; and a still more significant interweaving of human need and desire with the compassionate reach/toward the least and last soul on this earth. And the Holy Communion stands for not only the meeting of human spirits in happy relationship at the altar of the church, but also the meeting of human life with the life of God the Father.

Of course the Communion service requires confession: confession of sinful living which mars the relationships to which I have referred; and also confession of the need of human life for Divine comfort in a harsh world. You see certainly how practical is the nature of Holy Communion.