

Meditation on the *Didache* – FMC – Oct. 12, 2008 – John 6:47-58

On one wheat plant there are usually between 20 and 25 kernels.

At harvest time, the kernels from one wheat plant go through the combine and are mixed with the kernels of all the other plants in that part of the field.

The bin on the combine is full of grains that have never before been in contact with each other, but are all part of the same field.

From there the grains may go into a big grain cart or into a semi truck, where the diversity may be even greater; sometimes grains from different fields rest together in the truck.

Then comes the trip to the elevator, where one farmer's grains are dumped, then mixed with the grains of all the other local farmers.

There is no way of telling which grains belong to which field, no way of telling which grains came from which farmer.

From the elevator usually runs a train, in which grains are again mixed as they travel to a mill for processing.

In the case of wheat, when grains are ground into flour, that flour is a mixture of grains from different farmers, from different fields, from different parts of the country.

When you buy a bag of flour, you have no idea where the wheat came from, no idea how many farmers contributed grains of wheat for the bread you are about to bake.

But you, the baker of the bread, know how to take the gift of wheat from all those widely divergent sources, and make one loaf.

Every loaf of bread is a symbol of how many become one. Many grains, one loaf. One from many.

That's the central symbol of communion in the *Didache*.

The *Didache* is the earliest Christian writing we have that did NOT make it into the Bible.

At the same time that the four Gospels were being written,
the Didache was written—somewhere between 60 -100 A.D.
It's a handbook for new Christian converts—a catechism.
The word "Didache" means "teaching";
it's a summary of the teaching of the Early Church.

It has 16 short chapters:
6 chapters of basic Christian lessons on personal behavior.
4 chapters on Christian ceremonies, including communion,
and the last 6 chapters on church organization,
and some notes about the end of the world.

The full text of the Didache was lost for 1800 years.
There were fragments, but that was all.
But then, in 1875, it was discovered in a library in Constantinople.

Chapter 9 of the Didache suggests a prayer to be used in the communion
service, when it's time to serve the bread. Here's the text of that prayer:

*"We thank you, our Father, for the life and knowledge which You made
known to us through Jesus your servant; to you be the glory forever. Even
as this broken bread was scattered over the hills, and was gathered together
and became one, so let your church be gathered together from the ends of
the earth into your kingdom; for Thine is the glory and the power through
Jesus Christ forever."*

In the Didache, communion is a time to affirm the unity of the Church;
it's a time to celebrate that the fragmented and scattered church
of Jesus Christ WILL be made one.

Unity, you see, isn't so much just trying to "get along" with other churches
and other denominations.
Unity isn't really about tolerance.

No, the Didache's picture of unity is one that draws us to the end of
history, to the end of all things, when God, the divine Baker,
gathers all the Christian grains from all the fields
in all the places and lands and countries,
from all times and eras and periods of history,
and makes from them one loaf, one Church.

In our tiny and flawed ways, we work at the unity of the church here on earth. We work at being ecumenical, as do many others, but we are still very much separate grains on separate stalks in separate fields in separate countries in separate times.

But the words of that prayer draw us forward to the time when God will do what we cannot: take all the huge diversity that makes up the Christian church, and make it into one loaf, one Church.

It's a vision. It's a promise. It's a miracle of oneness that only God can create.

The broken bread that is scattered over the hills is gathered together and made one.

The church that is scattered over all the earth is gathered together and made one.

In God's kingdom the church is ONE, through the power of Jesus Christ.

Whenever we celebrate communion, whenever ANY Christian ANYWHERE from ANY tradition comes to the Lord's table, we are affirming that God's divine combine will come, will harvest us, will mix us and process us, and will create from us one loaf, one church.

Celebrating communion is an affirmation of what God will do. Celebrating communion is accepting God's plan, it's saying "yes" to becoming part of God's one loaf, and it's starting, even our flawed and limited ways, to affirm and work toward that oneness, even today.

Communion is a glorious celebration of "One From Many." It's a sign of the End, when ALL will be gathered as one loaf, into the very being of God.

As you participate today in this celebration, allow yourself to look forward to that great day, when all that has been scattered for so long, will be gathered together and made one.

Allow yourself to hope, and in that hope, to find joy.