

Trinity XIII

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[0 : 0 0] Teacher, what shall I do to inherit eternal life? It is the most important question we will ever receive the answer to.

What shall I do to inherit eternal life? The lawyer in the gospel lesson asked it to Jesus in order to justify his self-righteousness, which he found in the religious practices of Pharisaical Judaism.

But while he didn't ask with the right motive, he did ask the right question. Each of us needs to be asking the same question.

I was born into and raised in Roman Catholicism in the 1960s and 70s. In my later teen years, I fell away from the church and eventually Christianity, and then for about two years seriously practiced Buddhism, going so far as to take instruction in a Dharma house in Lexington, Kentucky.

By God's grace and mercy, I converted back to Christianity. I attended several independent evangelical churches. For the past 27 years, I have been an Anglo-Catholic.

[1 : 2 6] Looking back on this, I see the entire religious journey that I was on, including the Buddhism, was undertaken in hopes of finding an answer to the question, what shall I do to inherit eternal life?

Likely we've all sought to find the answer to this question in some way in our own lives. So what answer was I provided by each of those forms of religion?

The Roman Catholicism I was raised in was sacramental. For that, I am grateful. But its answer to the question on eternal life, or at least the one that has stuck with me, was mechanical.

One inherited eternal life by scrupulously doing the outward acts of religion, which that church required. I was taught nothing about scripture.

I was taught nothing about personal faith in Christ. Just do these things, which were constantly changing because of Vatican II, and I would at least get to purgatory.

[2 : 3 0] Independent evangelicalism supported the love for scripture that was graciously given with my conversion. For that, I am grateful.

But its answer to the question was, eternal life was inherited by making a profession of faith. It was believism. It taught me and my conversion, me and my faith, me and my Bible.

That was the answer. Ultimately, therefore, I determined what I shall do to inherit eternal life. Buddhism taught me salvation, and I'll put that in air quotes.

It's found in the emptying of the self and detaching from the material. Think of John Lennon's song, Imagine. Imagine there's no heaven, no religion, no possessions, that type of a thing.

As one empties and becomes detached, he or she becomes more deeply connected to divinity. Salvation is inherited in that connection.

[3 : 3 5] But what I found is, the more I emptied myself, the more I saw how sinful I am. And the more sinful I saw I am, the more I realized I needed a savior.

For that, I am grateful. But it's a dangerous route to take to the cross. I don't recommend it. So what is the answer to the question?

What shall I do? What shall we do to inherit eternal life? The answer is to enter ever more deeply into the sacramental life.

This is the answer scripture and the church's undivided tradition gives. This is the answer our Anglo-Catholic heritage teaches. The sacramental life is centered upon the Eucharist, the source and summit of the Christian life.

The deeper we enter into the mystery of the Eucharist, the deeper we enter into the eternal life offered to us in Jesus Christ. In St. John chapter 6, verses 53 through 56, Jesus says, Most assuredly I say to you, unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink his blood, you have no life in you.

[4 : 56] Whoever eats my flesh and drinks my blood has eternal life. And I will raise him up at the last day. For my flesh is food indeed, and my blood is drink indeed.

He who eats my flesh and drinks my blood abides in me, and I in him. 1 John chapter 5, verses 11 and 12 states, And this is the testimony, that God has given us eternal life, and this life is in his Son.

He who has the Son has life. He who does not have the Son of God does not have life. Religious mechanics of the mere profession of faith in Christ does not inherit eternal life.

No. We must receive and abide in Christ. In order to abide in Christ, we must eat his flesh and drink his blood in the Holy Eucharist.

This is the foundation of the sacramental life. In the fall of Adam, mankind lost its communion with God.

[6 : 09] Adam's eating of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil severed his communion with God, cut him off from the tree of life, and drove him out of paradise. Upon the cross on Calvary, the second Adam, Jesus Christ, reopened paradise.

Jesus told the good thief, Today you will be with me in paradise. In opening paradise, access to the tree of life is restored.

That tree is the cross. Represented, that word is anamnesis. Anamnesis. It means made present again to us in the Eucharist.

As we eat from this tree, this second tree of life, the bread which is our Lord's body and the wine which is our Lord's blood, they sustain us in the abiding life of Christ needed to inherit eternal life.

The sacramental life is more, though, than what we receive. It is also what we give of ourselves to the world in response to what we receive.

[7 : 25] By the Eucharist, our souls and bodies are fed to enable them to work out the grace and salvation God is working into us. St. Paul describes the sacramental life in 2 Corinthians 4, verses 7-12.

He writes, But we have this treasure in earthen vessels that the excellence of the power of God may be, I'm sorry, the excellence of the power may be of God and not of us. We are hard-pressed on every side, yet not crushed.

We are perplexed, but not in despair. Persecuted, but not forsaken. Struck down, but not destroyed. Always caring about in the body, meaning our bodies, the dying of the Lord Jesus, that the life of Jesus also may be manifested in our body.

For we who live are always delivered to death for Jesus' sake, that the life of Jesus also may be manifested in our mortal flesh. The sacramental life calls us to carry the crucifixion and the resurrection of Christ with us, in season and out of season.

The sacramental life calls us to manifest, that is, make visible the life of Christ in the service and salvation of others. We are to show our faith by our works.

[8 : 54] The sacramental life calls us to receive, contemplate, and live our day-to-day lives within the context of the Eucharistic mystery. What shall I do?

What shall we do to inherit eternal life? My religious journey could not answer this most essential question. Religion alone can't answer it.

The true answer to this question is found in living the sacramental life. This is the answer of Scripture, the Church's tradition, and our Anglo-Catholic heritage gives to this essential question.

And the other answer is insufficient. In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost. Amen.