

Reflection from the *'Little Book of Lent'* – an anthology composed by Reverend Canon Arthur Howells (2014, London: Harper Collins) comprising extracts from several of his favourite spiritual writers and reproduced here with his kind permission.

## 2.Thursday, Week Three

For Reflection

*Rowan Williams, a distinguished theologian, writer and poet, and form Archbishop of Canterbury, provides us with a profound summary of Christian belief as found in the Creeds in his book Tokens of Trust from which the following extract comes.*

Becoming What He Is

When we come together to pray at Holy Communion, we do so as baptized believers, people whose lives have been 'soaked' in the life of Jesus by the coming into our lives of the Spirit. And so our prayer is, so to speak, dropped into his, absorbed into his. We stand before God the Father, clothed in the identity of Jesus by the gift of the Spirit. We prayerfully give into Jesus' hands the bread and wine, so that *his* prayer may be made over them. His prayer is that they should become his body and blood. What he prays for happens, because he is the perfect channel of the Holy Spirit's action. So the bread and wine are given back to us, transformed by the Spirit, to make us more deeply what we already are, to confirm the bond that God has created between himself and us.

The congregation assembled for the 'Eucharist', the Thanksgiving – to give it one of its oldest and most meaningful names – is standing in the midst of the fire, like the three young men in the fiery furnace in the Old Testament Book of Daniel (chapter 3); and, as in that strange and wonderful story the three young Jews who are being persecuted by the Babylonian king walk unharmed through the fire because a fourth figure, who is 'like a Son of God', walks with them, so we walk in the fire of God's love accompanied by the eternal Son of God, who has welcomed us into his company. To use yet another Old Testament image, from Exodus this time (chapter 24), we see God and we eat and drink, as the elders of Israel do on the top of the holy mountain after the covenant sacrifice has been offered. And more than one poet and preacher in the history of the Church has written of this in terms of the fire from heaven that falls on the offering of the prophet Elijah (1 Kings 18). Holy Communion is a real 'Pentecostal' experience – like the great event at the beginning of the Church's story that is told by St Luke in Acts chapter 2, the fire coming down on the disciples as they gather in obedience to the risen Christ.

When we receive the bread and wine at Communion, we are nearest the very heart of what it is to be a Christian and to be the Church. We stand in the power of his prayer; we stand there because we have been invited by the risen Jesus, just as he invited sinners to eat with him in his life on earth; we pray in the Holy Spirit and we receive gifts that the Holy Spirit has made to be vehicles of his life. It is a moment when we declare who we are and when we are given the greatest opportunity to grow as believers because we are as open as we can be to the act of God in Jesus and the Spirit.

TOKENS OF TRUST  
ROWAN WILLIAMS

Scripture Reading  
Ephesians 3:14-21

*'For this reason, I bow my knees before the Father.'*

Prayer

Lord, you welcome us to your Table  
where you are present with us  
in bread and wine.

Come to us  
to transform us to be  
your people,  
your Body  
in the world today.