Sunday, October 2, 1977
A WORLD-WIDE COMMUNITY
Genesis 12:1-3; Matthew 28:18-20

Many hours ago, on this first Sunday in October, Christians in the Fiji Islands and in New Zealand were among the first to celebrate Holy Communion on this World-Wide Communion Sunday. As the earth continues to rotate and the sun dawns on other continents, millions of Christians around the world will gather at the Lord's Table today in a spiritual fellowship that defies and transcends barriers. Although separated by geography and culture and politics, and even by the manner in which we receive the sacrament, these our brothers and sisters in the Christian faith have in common with us their commitment to the Church of Jesus Christ and its ministry to all the world.

Not only is the Christian Church a world-wide community, but it also goes back in history thousands of years. The church had its beginning many centuries ago when God called Abraham. Now the Lord said to Abraham, "Go from your country and your kindred and your father's house to the land that I will show you. And I will make of you a great nation, and I will bless you ... and by you all the families of the earth will be blessed."

What God began with Abraham was continued with Isaac, Jacob, Leah, Rachael, Joseph, Ruth, David, on up through Jesus Christ, and the Christian Church in our own time. The Hebrew people are our mothers and fathers in the faith. By working through them, God was expressing an interest not only in them, but through them God was working for the unity of all people. Their blessing was to be spread out until it became a blessing for all the families of the earth. Thus, Jesus told his disciples after his resurrection, "Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, to the close of the age."

Today especially we are reminded that we are part of a long line of the people of God. Standing in this tradition does not mean that we are any better than other people; it is rather that God has called us to be God's witnesses.

Today as we remember our history and as we see ourselves afresh as part of a world-wide community, we will regain a sense of our identity and perspective. Often in our own local communities and congregations, with our many and varied church programs and activities, we come to think of the church in only a limited sense. We think of it in terms of our own congregation and the people we know. We forget that we are part of a world-wide community that goes far back in history.

Recently I was reading an autobiographical account of a man who had had an active religious upbringing, but then as a young adult had gone through a period of extreme doubt and inactivity in regard to his Christian faith. Now, however, he is finding his way back into the Christian community. He explained why this is happening.

"Presently I find myself increasingly committed to the Christian community and its heritage. In the past few years, however, there has been a significant change in the way I approach my tradition. The issue no longer is what 'really happened' some 2000 years ago. I have given up on settling the question of the resurrection, whether Jesus was born of a virgin and on many other specific details of his life ... I now feel comfortable reciting the Apostle's Creed without

editing it or feeling a pang of conscience if I affirm something that I do not literally believe. I recite the creed because it is a statement of my history, of the tradition that has united the Christian community for 20 centuries. Wanting to be part of that community of faith, I recite the creed thereby affirming my tie to the community."

In a similar way to take Holy Communion is to rehearse a significant event in the life of this community as it has existed throughout history. The celebration of Holy Communion has been through all the years absolutely central to this community's life. Truth is somehow embodied and carried in ritual and other collective acts of the community.

So here we are today — members of a community of faith that goes back to Abraham. This world-wide community has a tradition in which we can locate ourselves in this universe and in history. To claim identity as a Christian is to align oneself with a community whose symbolic forms like Holy Communion have enabled it to deal creatively with the issues of life in all generations.

By being a Christian, we are part of a community that sanctions the pursuit of meaning and truth. Our worship services provide regular occasions for confessions of failure and occasion where we can be renewed and inspired. This community provides a setting where children can be nurtured and whether we be single or married we know we have an identity which comes from God.

Brothers and sisters in Christ, we are about to celebrate the joyful feast of the people of God. Come from the east and from the west, and from the north and from the south to gather about the table of our Lord.