

THE WORD AT HOLY COMMUNION

An outline for a short address on an occasion when children are present.
(Ref. II Kings 4, 1-7)

"What does it mean?" said the old lady. "It's a sign that God loves you," they told her. "A sign? Well, it certainly works. "She went back into the house where her sons were waiting for their meal. A man she didn't know had come to her when she was in despair over a debt. She knew she could never pay it - she was left alone after her husband died, with the two boys - and now they had threatened to take them away from her 'to work off the money'. That would be the end. Just then, the man came and seemed to have a gift of oil : she had to beg and borrow jars from all her neighbours. They all had plenty of empty jars around her home. When they were filled, there was enough to clear the debt - and the man left. Yes, it had to mean that God loved her. God had saved her life, and everything about it.

What does it mean for people coming out of this old church today, after a 'Supper' where we take so little off the plate, from the cups. The minister says, "It's a sign that God loves you". Ask the people and see if they think it works. Some will say that they had debts that they could never 'forgive' for themselves. Some were under threat. All will say they have found a gift of life quite beyond their own resources, a feeling of being treated generously. But more than that: one says, "You know, you want to go out and do something special for other people now - and you find you can, though you couldn't before. You don't have to go and pay them back in there. You suddenly feel free to spend yourself on others."

It's a sign that God loves us. It certainly works. It has Jesus as the man who comes; and saves life by giving life; and comes again.

A. W. M.

WASTING TIME WITH GOD.

"...for busy people time is often the most precious thing they have to give... We only deliberately waste time with those we love - it is the purest sign that we love someone if we choose to spend time idly in their presence when we could be doing something more "constructive". And so it is with prayer... It is the purest sign of our love for God that we are prepared to "waste" our time with him ; and it is only by wasting time in this way that we shall learn that it is not God who needs us but we who cannot live without him."

from 'Prayer for Pilgrims' by Sheila Cassidy (Fount Paperbacks: Collins £1.50)

CONGREGATIONAL RESPONSES

A PHILOSOPHICAL OVER-VIEW

Over the past three years we have witnessed the proliferation of Eucharistic Rites incorporating congregational responses. This is, of course, most obvious in the Reformed Churches of Britain. The Alternative Services Book has simplified and clarified responses for congregations in the Church of England. Strangely, one controversy which raged last year in certain circles involved the lack of responses in the services of the Iona Community.

The desire has been to increase the participation of the congregations in the significant services of the church. It is fairly obvious that this desire in the case of the Church of Scotland has often been frustrated, or ignored, but it is there.