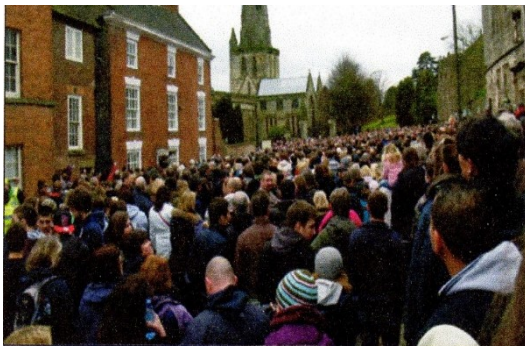




The two 'Teams'

of players or playing area so shops board up their windows. The two Teams are 'Upards' and 'Downards' depending on which side of the River Henmore you live. The ball is rarely kicked but is 'hugged' by a scrum which tries to move forward. Sometimes the ball goes into the Henmore and everyone follows!



Shrovetide footballs

Why do we continue with such traditions? Many were started as community events that bonded people together or gave them some sort of identity or belonging. When they are ended it is often because of financial gain to an individual or company.

What about Christians? Do we keep certain traditions? One, of course, is Holy Communion. This is something that has been kept by all denominations for almost 2,000 years. Why do we keep taking Holy Communion over and over again?

One of the last things that Jesus did before He took His final walk to the Garden of Gethsemane, was not some mighty miracle, but having a meal with His close disciples. From the disciples' point of view it started out as an ordinary meal with bread and wine, but Jesus was to turn it into something that has become a tradition for millions of people throughout the world ever since that memorable day.

Before the meal Jesus began the occasion by doing something that was very unusual; He washed the feet of His disciples. This job was something that was normally done by a slave. It is very interesting that the last thing that Jesus was to teach or show the disciples was not to encourage them to pray, evangelize, heal, help others or attend services, but a lesson in humility. How many of us would have made this a top priority if we were considering the last act of our lives? Jesus was emphasizing a servant heart, a heart that was prepared to do anything for the love of others.

Ashbourne is the nearest town to where I was brought up. Every Shrove Tuesday and Ash Wednesday for nearly 400 years there has been the tradition of Shrovetide Football. There are very few rules. There is to be no play after midnight, no transportation of the ball by vehicle and no murder or manslaughter! There are two goals which are three miles apart, one at Sturston Mill and the other at Clifton Mill, where the ball has to be tapped three times on the mill stone to score a goal. There is no limit to the number



Goal at Clifton Mill

At present someone has applied for planning permission to build 250 houses on some of the area that includes one of the goals. If permission for this is given, then it probably means the end of Shrovetide Football in Ashbourne. The objection to this is that this would mean an irreversible threat to Ashbourne's heritage.



During the meal that followed the washing of the feet, Jesus went on to state how the bread and wine were to be part of remembering what He was about to do. I would think that the disciples would still be focusing on the foot washing and not really understanding the implications of what Jesus was saying. It would only be **after** His death that the full meaning of what Jesus was saying, would be realized. There had been a number of occasions when Jesus had talked to His disciples about His death but it almost seems as if they never actually grasped the reality of what He was trying to tell them. Today we can read about the events that happened, but for those disciples at that meal, the death of Jesus was still a future event.

Reminders

In **Matthew 26: 26-28**, Matthew records the words of Jesus. ***‘... Jesus took bread, blessed and broke it and gave it to the disciples and said, “Take, eat, this is my body.” He took a cup and when He had given thanks He gave it to them saying, “Drink of it all of you for this is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins.”’*** Jesus left us with a tradition to follow that would constantly remind us of what He did for us. As we take Holy Communion, the bread and wine do not change and become the body and blood of Jesus, but are reminders. As we eat the bread we are reminded of the suffering of His body in the treatment that he received, which was then followed by the crucifixion. As we drink the wine we think of His life. Blood is an essential part of life so it reminds us that Jesus gave His life for each one of us.

2,000 Years

Why does the death of Jesus nearly 2,000 years ago make any difference to us today?

We have all done things wrong in our lives. We may not have murdered anyone but there are other acts which each one of us have committed in our lives. Things that may seem minor to us are not minor to God and would prevent us from being in the presence of a Holy God after death. After the last act of Jesus at that Passover meal, I would think that top of God’s list would be our pride. Pride has been something in each of our lives at some time or other. In **Romans 1**, Paul lists other things that are not acceptable to God, such as envy, greed, gossip and deceit. When Jesus died on the cross He said, “Sorry” to God for all of our wrongdoing. When we accept Jesus into our hearts, then the apology that Jesus made by His action on our behalf, means that we have a ‘clean slate’ and are acceptable in God’s eyes. We may have to face consequences of our wrongdoing during our lives on earth, but we can be assured of God’s forgiveness because of the death of Jesus.

None of us are perfect. In **Romans 3: 23**, it says, ***‘ALL have sinned and fall short of the glory of God.’*** If none of us are perfect, then this means that we are **all** responsible for the death of Jesus – Not just Pilate, not just the Romans, not just the Jews, but also you and I. Holy Communion is something that is very special. It is a tradition that reminds us that through the death of Jesus we have a ticket to Heaven. It may be ordinary bread and wine, yet what it represents is far from ordinary. The love of Jesus and the sacrifice that He made for us is overwhelming and the tradition of Holy Communion that Jesus asked us to continue, will be in place until He returns.