

Maundy Thursday—March 28, 2024

In the name of the Father and of the + Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

“But far be it from me to boast except in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ. In him is salvation, life, and resurrection from the dead; by him we are redeemed and set at liberty.”

We love the Lord’s Supper because we love the Lord who gave it to us, and we love the gifts he gives. The Lord’s Supper is the New Testament in the Lord’s blood. Jesus died and we the benefits. When he commands us, then, to “take and eat, take and drink” we don’t see this as a burden, but a blessing bestowed upon the church and for our good. He invites us to feast at the feast where he is the true Passover Lamb who has been sacrificed and now pours out and overflows what he has accomplished, forgiveness, life, and salvation. The Lord’s Supper is not an invention of man rather it was instituted, established by Christ himself on the night he was betrayed over into the hands of men to suffer and die for us. It’s no wonder why this day in the church year the hymn of day is Luther’s communion hymn, “O Lord, We Praise Thee.” For the gift of this blessed Sacrament we, the people of God, praise, adore, and in thanksgiving bow before the Lord who has given salvation to us and continues to give us such a wondrous gift of love.

Taking this seriously too, we examine ourselves because we know our sin and we know we don’t deserve what the Lord gives to us. We don’t own the Lord’s Supper. It doesn’t belong to us just as baptism, the word of God, the pastoral office, or the church don’t belong to us. They aren’t our possessions. That’s why a great term from the Sacrament of the Altar is the “Lord’s Supper.” St. Paul understands this as we see in the Epistle reading tonight when by the Holy Spirit he wrote, “For I received from the Lord what I also delivered to you.” The minute we think we are entitled to the Lord’s Supper or that we deserve to feast at his table is the minute we are unprepared and unworthy to eat and drink the Lord’s body and blood. God rightly teaches us to examine ourselves this night as he said through St. Paul in the Epistle reading, “Whoever, therefore, eats the bread or drinks the cup of the Lord in an unworthy manner will be guilty of profaning the body and blood of the Lord. Let a person examine himself, then, and so eat of the bread and drink of the cup. For anyone who eats and drinks without discerning the body eats and drinks judgment on himself. That is why many of you are weak and ill, and some have died. But if we judged ourselves truly, we would not be judged. But when we are judged by the Lord, we are disciplined so that we may not be condemned along with the world.”

Those words are true and always good for us to hear as we examine ourselves according to God’s law. We live in this world where the devil, the world, and our own fallen flesh still tempt us and draw us into sin and away from God. Therefore, we examine our lives and know rightly who we are in this all. The word and its derivatives used here for examine is used in other places as well for text, discern both for looking at oneself testing our works and examining our faith and for examining truth from error such as testing the spirits in 1 John 4 or testing of deacons/pastors in 1 Timothy 3. Take the Lord’s gifts seriously. Examine yourself. See your sin and repent. Be on guard against the devil and his evil ways. When we do this, we judge ourselves truly and see that we don’t deserve what the Lord gives but we appeal to his mercy shown to us in Christ. We turn from our sin and toward the Lord who has taken our sin upon himself. We go to the Lord’s Supper as sinners who need a gracious God to give us what only he can give.

Martin Luther famously preached in the Large Catechism, “If you could see how many knives, darts, and arrows are every moment aimed at you, you would be glad to come to the Sacrament as often as possible.” Why is that? It’s because the Lord’s Supper is the medicine of immortality. It’s the feast of life, giving you life, and pointing you to that day when the feast never ends and you have life in abundance. For God to give you the Lord’s Supper and you receive it is to find consolation in his arms and rest easy in his care. It’s to partake of and trust those words of promise that silence the devil, the fallen world, and your sinful flesh replacing it with the words of the Gospel, “given and shed for you.” That’s the encouragement God gives tonight to eat and drink what he has given and to partake of this often. The Lord has shown you mercy in Christ and his mercy overflows. His love is poured out his blood was shed on the cross and that same blood is given to you in this Sacrament delivering to you the forgiveness of sins and where there is the forgiveness of sins there is also life and salvation.

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Jesus is bodily present for you in the Lord's Supper. Your Lord loves you and doesn't leave you as orphans. No, far from it! He is still here with you and in your midst. This is not only a thing of great comfort but teaches you about the very nature of who your Lord Jesus is and connected with everything else he teaches you. In 1544, near the end of his life, he wrote, again, against those who denied that Jesus was truly physically present in the Lord's Supper. He got very blunt with them to the point that he said, "O dear man! If someone does not want to believe the article of faith concerning the Lord's Supper, how will he ever believe the article of faith concerning the humanity and divinity of Christ in one person? If you have doubts about whether you are receiving the body of Christ orally when you eat the bread from the altar, likewise, that you are receiving the blood of Christ orally when you drink the wine in the Lord's Supper, then you must surely have serious doubts (especially when the end of your life draws near) about how the infinite and incomprehensible Godhead, who is and must essentially be everywhere, can be bodily enclosed and included in the humanity and in the Virgin's body, as St. Paul says in Colossians [2:9]: 'In him the whole fulness of deity dwells bodily.'"

In other words, Luther is saying, if you don't take Jesus at his words when he says, "this is my body, this is my blood" how you can believe other parts of Scriptures? How can you believe he was born of the virgin or fully God and fully man or that his death really did atone for sin? Either all his word is true and clear or none of it is. He is the Lord and you are not. It is his Supper not yours. St. Paul understood this when he said, "For I received from the Lord what I also delivered to you." He received this word of Christ and as a steward of this gift he was called to administer it to God's people faithfully according to the institution of Christ and not according to what he thought best. Faithful pastoral care is nothing other than the care of Christ himself caring for you through his appointed office using the means the Lord has instituted.

Tonight, this, the Lord, and his Supper, is all yours as you are his own. Jesus loves you and gives you himself. It's a remarkable thing to hear that in the Gospel reading when St. John recorded, "Now before the Feast of the Passover, when Jesus knew that his hour had come to depart out of this world to the Father, having loved his own who were in the world, he loved them to the end." Jesus knew what would happen later that night and what was to take place in the coming hours yet his mind, his heart, his thoughts were on loving his disciples and yes, loving you. The Lord ate with his disciples and washed their feet for he came not to be served but to serve and his give his life as a ransom for many. God in the flesh got down on his hands and knees and washed the stinky, dirty feet of his disciples showing them this example of love they were to show to another. This is the mandate, related to "Maundy," the Lord gives, "A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another: just as I have loved you, you also are to love one another."

The Sacrament of the Altar, the Lord's Supper, is the sacrament of love. It's life changing and life forming for you as Christians. Just as God loves you in Christ and feeds you with his true body and blood given and shed for you, this produces love in your life as well. That post-communion collect sums it up well, "We give thanks to You, almighty God, that You have refreshed us through this salutary gift, and we implore You that of Your mercy You would strengthen us through the same in faith toward You and in fervent love toward one another; through Jesus Christ, Your Son, our Lord, who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever."

The mercy and love God shows to you in this supper spills out into your lives as you forgive the sins of those who sin against you and you serve where God has placed you in your church, homes, and the world around you. This is where the Sacrament extends out in its fruit which are shown in your lives as the people of God. Feasting upon the true Body of Christ, you go out in your vocations living as the Body of Christ, the church. You are what you eat, as the saying goes and so you live as little "Christs" as you love your neighbor as God has called you to live. This love too isn't abstract but it's to be shown in real ways to real people.

The love you show is not left up to your own devices nor do you have to wait for God to speak and reveal what this love looks like in your life. As Christians you see God's commandments don't only accuse you, as Christians they serve a guiding and teaching purpose of how you love your neighbor and what this love looks like. An example would be children honoring their father and mother and parents seeing to it they raise them up in the fear and love of the Lord.

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You see your neighbor's bodily needs and help him in them. You are faithful to your spouse and seek to live a sexually pure and decent life. You help your neighbor and his property and are content with all that you have been given. This is how you see you love your neighbor, which is also loving God. God produces this new life in you as he has baptized you, preaches to you, and feeds you in his Supper. The Lord does these works of love in your life and teaches you where and how they are done according to his will.

Dear people of God today you commemorate the day your Lord was handed over to suffer and die. This was all for you. His work has been accomplished and he gives you the benefits of what he done. Rejoice this night and consider this great love the shows and gives to you. Praise, adore, and give him thanks as you receive his word and feast at his Supper. Take, eat, take, and drink what your Lord gives you. Hold fast to this gift and keep coming back to it as often as possible. You are in this world, and you need Jesus. He is here and he is for you.

Dear people of God, the Lord loves you and came to serve and give his life as a ransom for you. Jesus has washed you in Holy Baptism and you have a share in him and his Kingdom. The Lord's Supper is his Supper, and he calls his church to treasure it and administer according to his institution. The Lord's Supper is for you. Come in repentance and faith to the feast the Lord gives. The Lord grants his church a faithful and steadfast confession of this gift until he comes again and that he humbles us that we never have a sense of pride, entitlement, or want to doubt or deviate from his word. We are all beggars and not even worthy to have the crumbs that fall from the Master's Table. Yet he is the merciful Lord who is the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world and gives the feast of salvation. Thanks be to God for this wondrous Sacrament. For this great treasure God's people praise him, bless, and adore him for such grace. "Thy holy body into death was given, life to win for us in heaven. No greater love than this to thee could bind us; may this feast thereof remind us! O Lord, have mercy! Lord, thy kindness did so constrain thee that thy blood should bless and sustain me. All our debt thou hast paid; peace with God once more is made: O Lord, have mercy!"

Today is Maundy Thursday and your Lord has given you a great gift of his love to you his bride, the church. What joy, what love, what a truly blessed Sacrament you have as your gift from your Lord. He has loved you and still does just as he loved you that Thursday night when he was betrayed. Taste and see that the Lord is good, and his steadfast love endures forever.

In the name of the Father and of the + Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.