

Holy Communion

Luke 22:7-26, Maundy Thursday

March 28, 2013

Beloved of the Lord.....On the very night of His betrayal by Judas, Jesus was greatly looking forward to eating this sacred Passover Meal with His disciples. Jesus said, "With desire I have desired to eat this Passover with you before I suffer." He was eager and anxious to share the Passover meal with them, for then and there He would give His disciples not only the bread and wine, but also His own body and blood....."Given and shed for you for the remission of sins." It meant a lot to Jesus, it was important to Him to give to His disciples that first and precious life-giving gift of Holy Communion - for through this Means of Grace, God would feed all disciples throughout the world thereafter, until Jesus come again with glory. Tonight, we too are disciples of the Lord, by faith in Jesus Christ, the same yesterday and today and forever. Tonight also this same Jesus will be with us invisibly by the Word, and we will receive with our mouth in a supernatural manner, His own body and blood. "This is My body which is given for you. This cup is the New Testament in my blood, which is shed for you." Even now in heaven above, the Lord desires to strengthen and increased your faith in His grace, by this feast of love. Through this Means of Grace He will personally assure your hearts God has put away your sins.

Certainly we see the great need for forgiveness, by the behavior of the disciples. Right after receiving Holy Communion, they began to quarrel over who would be greatest in the kingdom of heaven! "There was also a strife among them, which of them should be accounted the greatest." We still quarrel today wanting to be the greatest. We find ourselves comparing our works and deeds with others, and we also worry about what other people think of us. By way of pride and self-exaltation we want everybody else to look up to us and admire us as the model Christian. For our own self-preservation we also criticize rather than overlook the smaller faults of our neighbor. Sometimes we are so busy looking at the sins of others, we find little time to examine ourselves as God commands. All this is contrary

to our humble Savior Jesus who "being in the form of God, thought it not robbery to be equal with God: But made himself of no reputation, and took upon him the form of a servant, and was made in the likeness of men: And being found in fashion as a man, he humbled himself, and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross." If Jesus as Lord can so humble Himself, suffering the mockery and ridicule of the world for our sake, can't we humble ourselves for the Lord's sake, especially when He says, "To this man will I look, even to him that is poor and of a contrite spirit, and trembleth at my word." Faith examines its own sins, measuring and comparing its deeds to the Ten Commandments. We have enough sins of our own to repent of, and it is not our place to condemn others, for God alone is judge, and "with what judgment ye judge, ye shall be judged: and with what measure ye mete, it shall be measured to you again."

In the Holy Christian Church on Earth, the only standard whereby we wish to be judged is the holiness of Christ our Savior. What good are our works compared to His? All Jesus did was holy, but even our best works are grossly unholy, each carrying the spot and stain of sin - and only the blood of Christ can blot such out. This treasure then of His forgiveness, is the very thing God placed into the Sacrament of Holy Communion. His Word long ago spoken, puts the treasure of His body and blood into the Sacrament, and His Word also joins together the Body of Christ with the bread, and the Blood of Christ with the wine. And while we do not know the exact moment the union of bread and body take place, we do know that by the power of God's Word, when the communicant receives with his mouth the bread and wine, he at the same time receives the body and blood Christ, though in a supernatural manner. This Sacrament then which God has created does not rise and fall according to man's reason or wisdom, nor does its essence and nature change depending upon whether we believe it or not. It stands on its own, as a Sacrament divinely ordained by God for the preservation and support of His Church, you His disciple. Explaining the benefits then of the Lord's Supper Luther said, "that in the Sacrament forgiveness of sins, life, and salvation are given us through these words. For where there is

forgiveness of sins, there is also life and salvation."

Now concerning the question, "Who often should I commune", Christ simply answers, "This cup is the new testament in my blood: this do ye, as oft as ye drink it, in remembrance of me." We therefore receive the Lord's Supper "oft", or "often" remembering His great sacrifice on the cross. While we cannot become legalistic so that we make laws as to how often is often, we also should not neglect God's command that it be often. Our congregation has communion 12 or 13 times a year, but some in our fellowship have it twice a month. Then also most of our congregations have distant members who simply are not able to commune often due to distance, yet they are in no way sinning or despising the Sacrament. And so because Jesus said "This do" we cannot make this a matter of Christian liberty as if we are free NOT TO DO, but we are also NOT FREE to despise the Sacrament, for God's good treasures are placed therein, "More to be desired *are they* than gold, yea, than much fine gold: sweeter also than honey and the honeycomb." If we allow months to go by without communion, and we find no real desire to commune, we are despising the body and blood of Christ. This may not be intentional, but it is still the case as Luther said, "I call despising [the Lord's Supper] if one allow so long a time to elapse and with nothing to hinder him yet never feels a desire for it."

This is why before communing God commands us to examine ourselves. "Let a man examine himself, and so let him eat of that bread, and drink of that cup." Are we sorry to the Lord for our sins? Do we believe Jesus is our Savior from our sin? Do we earnestly desire to amend our sinful ways with the help of the Holy Spirit? If we answer YES to these questions, then by all means we should commune. And we should not stay away either if we feel unworthy, in the sense that we have committed many sins this past month and even now we are struggling with this or that temptation. Weak Christians should by all means approach the Lord's Table for that very reason - they are weak, for by Holy Communion God's good grace placed therein will surely help you "to obtain strength for a holier life." To put it another way, don't let your sins keep you from

communion, or you will never commune. Holy Communion is for sinners who know their sin and seek to be forgiven. They have heard the sweet invitation of Jesus who said "Come unto Me all ye that labor and are heavy laden and I will give you rest." Besides Luther's questions drawn up for those who intend to commune, the best preparation for Communion is simple faith in the heart. "I am a sinner, saved by grace alone. Amen." If you believe that, you are "worthy and well prepared". Truly the only time we should not commune is if we are impenitent and unbelieving in our heart, having no desire to amend our sinful ways.

And so beloved of the Lord, let us continue to faithfully use Holy Communion, this Means of Grace until the end of our lives, as the pastor says "May this strengthen and preserve you in the true faith, unto life everlasting." This agrees with Jesus who said that same night, "I will not drink of the fruit of the vine, until the kingdom of God shall come." God's kingdom is coming! Jesus is waiting in heaven for us! He will not drink the fruit of the vine again, until we are all gathered there together with Him and all the saints in our heavenly home! There is a great banquet waiting for us above, an eternal feast of God's love. Yet God in His mercy grants and gives us a feast of love here even now in this Sacrament upon our altar, Holy Communion. Look forward to it, be thankful for it, for your Lord Jesus is anxious to feed you with His grace and tender love. This will not only increase your faith, but preserve you in the true faith until you see Him face to face. Amen.