

Maundy Thursday/April 1, 2021
Mark 14:12-26/What We Receive
Holy Spirit Lutheran Church
Pastor Jerry Stobaugh

“Take; this is my body.”

What are we here to receive tonight? What is Christ Jesus offering to us? What do we receive from His gracious hand?

On this night, our Lord instituted His Holy Supper. This is no minor or casual meal. It is a serious and profound gift of God to His Church. We do well to learn and ponder upon the mystery and the blessing of this sacred Meal.

This Meal is the true holy Meal and true worship, unlike all other meals and man-made worship. All other foods, all other ceremonies, and all other pagan practices are hollow imitations. They serve an empty plate and an empty cup because their meals and worship accomplish nothing before God. Our cup, on the other hand, is filled to overflowing with grace.

When heathen nations ate the sacrifices to their gods, they hoped to receive the strength of the gods, but they did not. When revelers threw wild parties, as they do even today, indulging in every sinful pleasure with reckless abandon, they hoped to somehow escape the drudgery of this mortal existence and experience a perfect life of bliss, but they do not. When any false religion offered up some sacrifice, they hoped to appease their god, but they do not.

All those things’ pagans grasp for but fail, we have in the Meal Christ gives. We have the true power of God in Christ His Son. We escape mortality by the salvation of our God. Our God is appeased for us, fully and for all time. He is not appeased because we have done the

right things or followed the right rituals. No, it is through the Body and Blood of Christ.

We participate in the only true sacrifice, the Cross, when we eat and drink what the Lamb gave us. This is the true worship of God; to receive in faith the gifts He presents. This Meal is reality, not an illusion. It is not simply a matter of pious feelings or mere symbolism. It is not an abstraction, but instead a concrete reality. Indeed, it is the only reality that truly matters, since here is salvation and life. Here there is far more than a loaf of bread and a sip of wine. If that is all is here, what is to be gained by eating and drinking?

On the contrary, how wonderful is this Meal where we eat and drink Christ's Body and Blood. He does not merely give us a communion in a disembodied spirit. He does not merely command us to cast our minds into the clouds with our heavenly thoughts. Instead, He descends to us and feeds us Himself. We touch and we taste God, who is greater than all things. There is no higher reality to be grasped. This is it; the Supper of God.

In this Meal, we receive the forgiveness of sins as a reality, not as a future promise or a future possibility, or an offer yet to be received. Those who eat by faith are eating forgiveness. We drink remission of sins. This is the communion in the Body and Blood of Christ. Where union with Christ is, there is also forgiveness of sins, life, and salvation.

This is the food Christ gives His Church. He does not give it to those outside. If they dare eat it, they do not receive benefit, but eat and drink harm unto themselves. Remember, Christ did not fling abroad His holy Meal to the crowds, but He gave it secretly to the Disciples in the Upper Room. The crowds were not invited.

This sacrament is for holy people. We are, of course, not holy in ourselves, but through the Gospel; by grace, through faith, on account of Christ we are holy. We dare not approach communion on our own merits, but with repentance and humbly.

Consider how blessed we are to come to this Meal. We brood of vipers do not deserve to approach this most exclusive Meal, but to be exterminated on the spot. We are so unclean even our righteous deeds are like bloody, filthy rags. But through God's mercy, we are privileged to be invited. Indeed, He who is love binds us together. Who is the Christ whose Body and Blood we eat and drink? He is very God of very God; God who is love. So, we eat and drink pure love. When we eat and drink Him, we are knit together more closely than any earthly tie can bind.

As St. Paul writes to the Corinthians, [1 Cor 10:16-17] "The cup of blessing that we bless, is it not a participation in the blood of Christ? The bread that we break, is it not a participation in the body of Christ? Because there is one bread, we who are many are one body, for we all partake of the one bread."

Tonight, we drink from the cup, as a reminder we are joined as one by Christ. You may not feel the oneness. There may be someone with whom you feel out of harmony. When you experience disunity with a brother in the Church, go to him and work it out quickly. Sacrifice, if need be, in order to be restored with your brother. For we who are one loaf and one cup ought to never act as if we were separate and divided. The mystical union in the Supper moves us to live our lives in unity. As St. Paul wrote to the Ephesians, [Eph 4:3] "...eager to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace." Since we are one in the Supper, let us be one in our words and deeds.

By ourselves, we are unable to meet that challenge. But we have mighty tools to aid us. We have holy absolution, by which the offenses that divide us are forgiven. We have the holy Word of God. We have the Supper of Christ, our Lord and God, to unite us and strengthen us. Let us hunger and thirst after this holy Meal. Let us receive it in faith, recognizing Christ's true Body and Blood and proclaiming His death till He comes. Approach in repentant sorrow over your sinfulness, but leave in joy and contentment, satisfied by the only Meal that gives eternal life for you in the new heavens and new earth.