

On the journey through our earthly life to heaven, our good and gracious God provides a holy and precious meal to sustain and strengthen us on our pilgrimage—the Lord's Supper. What a privilege it is for us to receive this powerfully comforting gift! Thanks and praise forever be to God for the Sacrament of the Altar.

Why do we need the Lord's Supper?

As we examine our lives in the bright light of God's holiness, we realize how much we have sinned and how much we need His forgiveness. Our sinfulness and the troubles, sorrows, difficulties and stresses of our life in this fallen world are all reasons we need the Lord's Supper.

As great as is our need, even greater is the life-giving meal He has provided! It is a very personal way God works in our life to save us, to strengthen us and to keep us close to Him. Jesus promised to be with us always, to the very close of the age (Matt. 28:20). Through His precious Word and Sacraments, our Lord continues to fulfill His promise.

Our Lord Jesus Christ instituted the Sacrament of the Altar with these words: *"This is My body, given for you. This cup is My blood of the new testament, shed for you for the forgiveness of sins"* (Matthew 26:26-29; Mark 14:22-25; Luke 22:14-20; 1 Corinthians 11:23-25). The Lord's Supper "is the true body and blood of our Lord Jesus Christ under the bread and wine, instituted by Christ Himself for us Christians to eat and to drink" (Small Catechism).

What is Jesus giving us in the Lord's Supper?

In the Sacrament of the Altar our Lord and Savior is continually distributing to us the body and blood of the sacrifice He made for us, the sacrifice by which He paid for the sins of the entire world. Thus, receiving His body and blood, we receive forgiveness, life and salvation. Flowing from these tremendous treasures of God's mercy are the love, peace and hope that He gives us in His Supper, and the ability and desire to do God's will, living in love and harmony with others.

It is often observed how there is a foreshadowing of the Lord's Supper in the Old Testament discussion of how the sacrifices were eaten by those for whom they were offered (1 Corinthians 10:18). The Scriptures indicate that without the shedding of blood there is no forgiveness of sins (Hebrews 9:22). The blood of Jesus Christ, God's Son, cleanses us from all sin (1 John 1:7; Matthew 26:28; Acts 20:28; Romans 5:9; Hebrews 9:14,12:24; 1 Peter 1:18-19; Revelation 1:5, 7:14). And it is this very blood He gives in His Supper.

How is Jesus present in His Supper?

We do not try to explain how Jesus is present under the bread and wine of the Lord's Supper, rather we believe, teach, confess and rejoice that He is present. We Lutherans let the words of Jesus stand without arguing about their possibility, or trying to explain how they are true. As Luther put it so clearly, "We maintain that the bread and the wine in the Supper are the true body and blood of Christ" (SA III. 6). Everyone who communes receives into their mouths

the body and blood of Jesus Christ, whether they believe it or not, be they worthy or unworthy.

Jesus' Word is sure and certain. The Holy Spirit gives us faith to trust in and believe Jesus' words, "Given and shed for you for the forgiveness of sins." Faith in Christ's promise is what makes us worthy to receive His Supper. Christ's words of institution retain their validity and efficacious power and thus, by virtue of these words, the body and blood of Christ are truly present, distributed and received.

Why do we receive the Lord's Supper often?

We receive the Lord's Supper often because of how much we need what the Lord gives in His Supper. We dare never make a law about how often an individual "should" or "must" receive the Lord's Supper. But this is a separate question from how frequently Holy Communion is offered in our congregations. Our Lutheran Confessions make it clear that the Lord's Supper is offered every Lord's Day and on other days when there are communicants present (AC XXIV.34 and Ap.XXIV.1).

In saying this, our Confessions are merely reflecting the truth of the Sacred Scriptures, which place the Lord's Supper at the center of worship (Acts 2:42, 20:7; 1 Corinthians 11:20, 33), not as an appendage or an occasional extra. It is for this reason that our Synod has repeatedly encouraged our congregations to provide the opportunity for communicants who so desire to receive the Lord's Supper every Lord's Day.

What should we do if we do not feel a need to receive the Lord's Supper?

Because of our sinful human nature, we are tempted at times to think, "I don't need to take Communion. I just don't feel like it." But when we feel this way, we need to realize that in the Lord's Supper, the holy God of God, and Light of Light, very God of very God, is coming among us, under the bread and wine, to be with us, to join Himself to us, to forgive, renew and strengthen us.

In preparing to receive the Lord's Supper, it is good for us to review, "Secondly, that he look around to see whether he is still in the world, and keep in mind that there will be no lack of sin and trouble, as the Scriptures say in John 15-16 and in 1 John 2 and 5. "Thirdly, he will certainly have the devil also about him, who with his lying and murdering, day and night, will let him have no peace within or without, as the Scriptures picture him in John 8 and 16; 1 Peter 5; Ephesians 6; 2 Timothy 2."

Conclusion

Here is how one Lutheran theologian beautifully describes the precious treasure of the Lord's Supper: *"The Israelites were fed with manna in the wilderness as with bread from heaven (Exodus 16:15). In this Holy Supper we have the true manna which came down from heaven to give life to the world. Here is that bread of heaven, that angel's food, of which if any man eat he shall never be hungry (John 6:35, 51).*

"The children of Israel had the ark of the covenant and the mercy seat, where they could hear the Lord speaking with them face

to face (Exodus 25:21-22). Here we have the true ark of the covenant, the most holy body of Christ, in whom are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge (Colossians 2:3). Here we have the true mercy seat in the precious blood of Christ (Romans 3:25), through which God has made us accepted in the Beloved (Ephesians 1:6).

"Nor does Christ simply speak the word of comfort to our souls, He also takes up His abode in us. He feeds our souls not with heavenly manna, but, what is far better, with His own blessed self. Here is the true gate of heaven for our souls, and the ladder reaching from earth to heaven on which the angels of God ascend and descend (Gen.28:12).

"Christ holds us dear because He has bought us at so dear a price. He holds us dear because He feeds our souls with so dear and precious a food. He holds us dear because we are members of His body, of His flesh (Ephesians 5:30).

"The holy flesh of God, which the angelic hosts adore in the unity of the divine nature, before which archangels bow in lowly reverence, and before which the principalities and powers of heaven tremble and stand in awe, has become the nourishment for our souls. Let the heavens rejoice and the earth be glad (Psalm 96:11), but still more let the believing soul exult and sing for joy, to whom God gives such an unspeakable gift" (John Gerhard, Sacred Meditations, pg. 103ff.)

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"Christian Questions with Their Answers" from Martin Luther's Small Catechism:

1. Do you believe that you are a sinner?

Yes, I believe it. I am a sinner.

2. How do you know this?

From the Ten Commandments, which I have not kept.

3. Are you sorry for your sins?

Yes, I am sorry that I have sinned against God.

4. What have you deserved from God because of your sins?

His wrath and displeasure, temporal death, and eternal damnation. See Rom. 6:21, 23.

5. Do you hope to be saved?

Yes, that is my hope.

6. In whom then do you trust?

In my dear Lord Jesus Christ.

7. Who is Christ?

The Son of God, true God and man.

8. How many Gods are there?

Only one, but there are three persons: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

9. What has Christ done for you that you trust in Him?

He died for me and shed His blood for me on the cross for the forgiveness of sins.

10. Did the Father also die for you?

He did not. The Father is God only, as is the Holy Spirit; but the Son is both true God and true man. He died for me and shed His blood for me.

11. How do you know this?

From the holy Gospel, from the words instituting the Sacrament, and by His body and blood given me as a pledge in the Sacrament.

12. What are the words of institution?

Our Lord Jesus Christ, on the night when He was betrayed, took bread, and when He had given thanks, He broke it and gave it to the disciples and said: "Take eat; this is My body, which is given for you. This do in remembrance of Me."

In the same way also He took the cup after supper, and when He had given thanks, He gave it to them, saying: "Drink of it, all of you; this cup is the new testament in My blood, which is shed for you for the forgiveness of sins. This do, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of Me."

13. Do you believe, then, that the true body and blood of Christ are in the Sacrament?

Yes, I believe it.

14. What convinces you to believe this?

The word of Christ: Take, eat, this is My body; drink of it, all of you, this is My blood.

15. What should we do when we eat His body and drink His blood, and in this way receive His pledge?

We should remember and proclaim His death and the shedding of His blood, as He taught us: This do, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of Me.

16. Why should we remember and proclaim His death?

First, so that we may learn to believe that no creature could make satisfaction for our sins. Only Christ, true God and man, could do that. Second, so we may learn to be horrified by our sins, and to regard them as very serious. Third, so we may find joy and comfort in Christ alone, and through faith in Him be saved.

17. What motivated Christ to die and make full payment for your sins?

His great love for His Father and for me and other sinners, as it is written in John 14; Romans 5; Galatians 2; and Ephesians 5.

18. Finally, why do you wish to go to the Sacrament?

That I may learn to believe that Christ, out of great love, died for my sin, and also learn from Him to love God and my neighbor.

19. What should admonish and encourage a Christian to receive the Sacrament frequently?

First, both the command and the promise of Christ the Lord. Second, his own pressing need, because of which the command, encouragement, and promise are given.

20. But what should you do if you are not aware of this need and have no hunger and thirst for the Sacrament?

To such a person no better advice can be given than this: first, he should touch his body to see if he still has flesh and blood. Then he should believe what the Scriptures say of it in Galatians 5 and Romans 7. Second, he should look around to see whether he is still in the world, and remember that there will be no lack of sin and trouble, as the Scriptures say in John 15-16 and in 1 John 2 and 5. Third, he will certainly have the devil also around him, who with his lying and murdering day and night will let him have no peace, within or without, as the Scriptures picture him in John 8 and 16; 1 Peter 5; Ephesians 6; and 2 Timothy 2.

Note:

These questions and answers are no child's play, but are drawn up with great earnestness of purpose by the venerable and devout Dr. Luther for both young and old. Let each one pay attention and consider it a serious matter; for St. Paul writes to the Galatians in chapter six: "Do not be deceived: God cannot be mocked."

From *Luther's Small Catechism* © 1986 Concordia Publishing House, cph.org

LUTHER'S PREFACE

There Luther talks about those times when we just may not "feel" like receiving the Lord's Supper. Luther writes, "To such a person no better advice can be given than that, in the first place, he put his hand into his shirt and feel whether he still has flesh and blood, and that he by all means believe what the Scriptures say about it in Galatians 5 and Romans 7."