

Holy Thursday - 4/2/2015 *Text: 1 Corinthians 11:23-32*

John writes in his Gospel that Jesus, **"having loved his own who were in the world, he loved them to the end."** On the night he was betrayed, Jesus loved us - His Church, His Christians. He loved us enough to institute His Supper, the New Testament in His Blood.

The Supper is a feast of love; it is a meal of the most intimate bond imaginable. Christ instituted it in love for His people. In His Supper Jesus unites Himself with you; pouring into you His living and risen Body and Blood.

But the Supper is also the source of the most intimate brotherly love among us, His Christians. We heard this in the address at the beginning of the service: *"For we are all one bread and one body, even as we are all partakers of this one bread and drink from the one cup. For just as the one cup is filled with wine of many grapes and one bread made from countless grains, so also we, being many, are one body in Christ."* Or as the great Lutheran teacher Norman Nagel puts it, in Christ's Supper we are all *"Bodied and Bloodied together."*

Or as St. Paul puts it in 1 Corinthians 10: **"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."**

What Paul means is that in coming together to receive the Lord's Supper, we are united. We together have a share – a *communion* – in Christ's forgiveness. We are one in body and spirit and faith and confession. We, Christ's Bride, are intimately united with our Heavenly Bridegroom. We receive the fruits of His love for us: forgiveness. We share in the fruits of His love together by loving one another.

So when Paul gets to 1 Corinthians 11 and again addresses the Supper, He states the words which he received from Christ Himself: the Words that Jesus spoke on that Thursday night of Holy Week. And then Paul reveals how the division in the Corinthian congregation is harmful. Christ is uniting them into one body, and they are ripping the Body of Christ right back apart by their failure to love one another.

This has to do with the clear proclamation of the Gospel. As Paul puts it: **"For as often as you eat this bread and drink the cup, you proclaim the Lord's death until he comes."** To come and receive the Sacrament is to preach the Gospel. Christ died. Christ is risen. Christ is truly, really, present here on this altar for His Christians to eat and drink His crucified and risen Body and Blood for their forgiveness. Christ loves us. We love each other. We are united in His Gospel.

So if you deny this, even in part, you are denying part of His Gospel. You are not proclaiming with us the fullness of His Gospel. In the same way that someone is in error who denies Christ's Baptismal promises,

whomever denies that in the Supper Christ's Body and Blood are truly present under the bread and wine for forgiveness is in error. This person hasn't necessarily fully denied the Gospel; he may well still proclaim that Christ's death for sin is received by grace, through faith, without works. But he's divided himself from the fullness of what Christ teaches. Or, to put it in Paul's terms, he's failed to **"proclaim the Lord's death until he comes"** in all its fullness. Thus we are not united; we are divided, at least in part.

Do these divisions in His Church grieve our Lord? Certainly. They grieve us too. I find it devastating. Yet Christ Himself provides the fix. When it comes to His Supper, Jesus assuredly states what it is. When it comes to the Supper, we could easily mend the division if we'd merely listen to Jesus and believe His words. There's no reason to doubt. Christ's words of institution, given by St. Paul as well as by Matthew, Mark, and Luke, are crystal clear: **"This is my body." "This cup is the new testament in my blood." "Is"** means is. Christ our Lord doesn't lie, and He gives zero indication that we should take His words in any other way. He explains nothing after the fact as if it's a parable or an allegory.

If His words are ambiguous, then we can argue this way or that what they might mean. But here Jesus is completely unambiguous. This is *not* a hard saying of Jesus. Here Jesus wants to be sure that we have no room to doubt His gift and promise. Jesus institutes this meal in order to convey to you the sure and certain forgiveness of your sins. So He speaks in the

clearest way possible. **"This is my body." "This cup is the new testament in my blood."**

And we must never let up in asserting that Jesus' word **"is"** means is. If we allow doubt to creep in about such a simple and clear word, then what happens when we get to the benefit of the Supper? If we can't trust that Jesus means *is* when He says **"is,"** then how can we be sure and certain that He actually means *"for you"* when He says **"for you"**?

Because that is the chief purpose of the Sacrament of the Altar. Jesus, **"on the night when he was betrayed"** instituted the Supper. Jesus soon found Himself in front of the Sanhedrin, in front of Pilate, in front of the mobs; soon found Himself on Golgotha, His hands and feet pierced, His voice crying out in forsakenness, His Spirit given up, His body entombed. **"For. You."**

Jesus certainly unites us one to another. But as I said at the beginning, He also unites us to Himself. Or perhaps it's even better said that He unites Himself to us. For Jesus comes in His glorified and risen Body and Blood and feeds you Himself, by my unworthy hand. Jesus comes and gives you the complete forgiveness of your sin. Take, eat. Take, drink. The true Body and Blood of Jesus *is* here for forgiveness, *for you*.

Amen.

- Pastor Michael Schuermann S.D.G.

