

"The New Testament In My Blood"

Luke 22:15-20, New Year's Day, January 1, 2006

Beloved of the Lord.....What is life, if we have nothing to look forward to? What is life, if there is not a hope or a glimmer in our hearts about what lies ahead? All of us need something to look forward to. When we are children we look forward to summer vacations, playing games with friends, spending time with our mothers or fathers. When we are teenagers we are anxious to mature into adults, drive cars, get away from home, fall in love and get married. When married we are anxious to have kids, raise a family, succeed as mothers and fathers, or be successful at work. When we reach our 50's or 60's, after years of hard work and toil, we simply look forward to retirement, spending those golden years in bliss and peace.

We all need something to look forward to. Thankfully, when we have Christ in our lives, we always have hope. Yes, through Christ Jesus, there still remains the firm hope of heaven, where Jesus lives and reigns even now with the Church Triumphant, our departed saints. But if all this is true and we know it to be so, why do we so often find in our hearts a lack of joy, a failure to look forward to heaven above? Why do we sometimes find in our hearts fear? dread? and worry? Why are we often afraid of our conquered enemy, death? Why do we still find ourselves so weak, having moments of doubt and unbelief?

Dear friends, we are but flesh and blood. As long as we live here on earth, in our weak and trembling hearts, there will always be fears, worries, doubts, and even unbelief. But when we struggle with such, I can give no better advice to you than this, "Fear not little flock, for it is your Father's good pleasure to give you the kingdom." Lk 12:32 These are not my words, but the words of your Lord Jesus to you. He tells you not to fear or worry because there is no need. It is your Father's greatest desire and good pleasure to give you heaven above! Therefore, fear not! Your salvation, your place in heaven, has already been secured by the Son of God Himself, therefore " Rejoice! Because your names are written in heaven!" Lk 10:20

Dear Christian, indeed you have much to look forward to in heaven. God still desires your salvation and He will see to it that you are kept and preserved in the true faith unto the end. In our text today we see so clearly how God keeps and preserves us in the true faith, by His Means of Grace, Holy Communion. Let us therefore focus our attention on God's own words this morning as we begin a New Year. And with the Lord's blessing may it be another year of God's tender grace, mercy, and favor.

I. Blood must be shed in order for sins to be forgiven. Our text begins today with straightforward words of Jesus to His disciples. Jesus says to them "With desire I have desired to eat this Passover with you, before I suffer." On the very eve of His own crucifixion and death, we see Jesus filled with joy over the very thought of holding the Passover with His disciples! "With desire, I have desired", we hear Jesus say!

How greatly God's own Son anticipated this first Holy Communion with His disciples! How His heart yearned and desired to eat the Passover with them, for then they would be strengthened by God's power, with the very body and blood of their Lord Jesus!

To properly understand Holy Communion, let us first begin with the Biblical teaching that there is no forgiveness of sins, unless there is the shedding of blood. In the Old Testament, the paschal Lamb had to first be sacrificed, and its blood shed in order for the Passover to take place. Consider also the many other animal sacrifices of the Old Testament Church. It is described in Hebrews this say, "When Moses had spoken every precept to all the people according to the law, he took the blood of calves and of goats, with water, and scarlet wool, and hyssop, and sprinkled both the book, and all the people, saying, This is the blood of the testament which God hath enjoined unto you." Heb. 9:19-21 Moses took the blood of sacrificed animals, and he sprinkled this blood everywhere, even on the people! But why did God command this? He commanded this because everything in the congregation was unclean, unholy, stained and spotted with sin. The vessels were unclean because sinful man touched them. The book was unclean because sinful man used it. The people were unclean because they were born of Adam and Eve. Their sins repulsed God in heaven and only blood could atone for them!

But our sins repulse God in heaven as well. We find ourselves guilty of the same sins as any other man. Like the Israelites we covet after things which are not lawful for us to have. Like the Israelites we commit idolatry, for we bow down before idols in our hearts, when we love the things of this world more than the things of God. Like the Israelites we commit fornication when we lust after women with our eyes. Like the Israelites, we tempt Christ to forsake us by committing evil deeds. Like the Israelites, we murmur and complain instead of being content with all that we have from our Lord.

These words are meant to show us our great guilt before Almighty God. When we feel sorrow and conviction in our hearts over sin, we should repent. But neither sorrow over sin, nor repentance is enough to bring forgiveness. The Bible says "Without shedding of blood is no remission." In order for there to be forgiveness, blood must be shed, and it is a payment we cannot make. For even if we were to sacrifice ourselves, and shed our own blood in payment to the Lord, it would not merit the forgiveness of even one sin, for our blood is already unclean. It has already been tainted by sin. Hence we cannot save ourselves, nor others. The Bible says "None of them can by any means redeem his brother, nor give to God a ransom for him."

But do not despair! Let us thank God, and here give praise to His holy name! In great mercy God did not require such a payment from us, but instead He required it of His own Son Jesus Christ. And Jesus Christ was willing to make this payment for you on the cross "with His holy precious blood, and with His innocent suffering and death!"

Jesus was able to save us, because He gave the world His own body and blood as a perfect and complete sacrifice. God sacrificed Himself for man, "having made peace through the blood of his cross." Col. 1:20 God's own blood in Jesus Christ has then merited and earned our forgiveness. "The blood of Jesus Christ His Son, cleanseth us from all sin." I Jn. 1:7 "Much more then, being now justified by his blood, we shall be saved from wrath through him." Rom. 5:9 In Jesus Christ "we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of sins, according to the riches of his grace." Eph 1:7

II. Christ Jesus our Lord, now gives us His own body and blood. Brethren our Lord wants us to have faith and believe in His free gift of salvation, His gift of Jesus Christ freely given to the world. Moreover God even today gives to His children of faith, this same Jesus Christ, through His body and blood in Holy Communion. Returning to our text, when Jesus observed the Passover with the disciples, He was also initiating the first Holy Communion which His Church is to observe till the end of time. Jesus therefore says to His disciples, and to all believers today, "This is my body which is given for you: this do in remembrance of me. Likewise also the cup after supper, saying, This cup is the new testament in my blood, which is shed for you." Literally verse twenty says "This cup is the new covenant in my blood, which is poured out for you."

This reminds us of the cross doesn't it? The same body of Jesus Christ, which was nailed to the cross 2000 years ago is given to you today in communion for the forgiveness of sins. That same blood which He offered for your sake 2000 years ago, he still today gives freely to you for the remission of sins. As Jesus said to the disciples back then, even so He says to us today "With desire I have desired to eat this Passover with you." With great desire our Lord God desires that we commune with Him through His body and blood.

III. Forgiven of our sins, we are strengthened in faith. But why is this so important to the Lord, and why should it be so important to us? First, it is important to the Lord, for the Lord knows are natural weaknesses. To receive then the body and blood of our Lord Jesus, is to receive the living Gospel; tasted with our mouths, yet feeding our souls. Hence when you receive the bread and drink the cup, you likewise receive the same body and blood of your Lord Jesus Christ in a supernatural manner. There is nothing crude or unholy here, but rather a beautiful gift from God, namely His body and blood.

But we receive far more than the body and blood of the Lord Jesus in Holy Communion. Most importantly we receive the forgiveness of sins. And here with the word forgiveness we get down to the heart of the matter - for communion is about forgiveness - God's forgiveness to you. Our catechism explains it this way, "Christ gives to every communicant as a pledge of the remission of sins that same body and blood with which He earned for us the forgiveness of sins." Hence the body and blood of Jesus are God's

tokens to you perhaps "living proofs" that your sins are indeed purged away. That indeed is why Holy Communion should be important to us, because this is one of God's means or ways of giving to us the precious forgiveness of sins.

For a moment, let us talk briefly about who communion is for. We know it is not for everyone, for the Bible says "whosoever shall eat this bread and drink this cup of the Lord unworthily shall be guilty of the body and blood of the Lord." I Cor. 1:27 Unbelievers are not permitted to commune. Those who don't believe that the body and blood of the Lord are present in Communion, dare not commune lest they receive this sacrament unworthily. But who then are the worthy communicants? Perhaps at times we get nervous about communion and worry whether or not we are worthy communicants? Who then is worthy? Well let me ask you these questions. 1) Do you believe you are a sinner, who because of sin merits only death and damnation? 2) Are you sorry for your sins? 3) Do you believe Jesus Christ died on the cross to save you from your sins? If you answered yes to these three questions, you are indeed a "worthy" communicant. Namely you are worthy because you know well your need for a Savior, and your need for forgiveness. Please then come to communion, do not fear but rejoice! For here in communion your Lord Jesus is giving you His own body and blood, that you may know and believe that He has cleansed you of all sin. "For where there is forgiveness of sins, there is also life and salvation."

So you see in the end, we do have much to look forward to, namely everlasting life in heaven. For in the True Christian Church, there is true and real forgiveness of sins from God Himself, who sent His Son to save us. Being justified by faith we have peace with God. You can confidently go forth into the world, fearing nothing, for Christ has conquered all for your sakes. "Fear not little flock, for it is your Father's good pleasure to give you the kingdom." And give you the kingdom He has! Therefore if you are communing today, come before Him with praise and thanksgiving, knowing and believing that His blood is "given and shed for you, for the remission of sins." And if you are not communing today, remember that you likewise abide under God's grace and favor. For "Whoso believeth and is baptized shall be saved." Brethren, Jesus Christ and all in heaven await you. With desire, Jesus greatly desires your salvation and your triumphant entrance into heaven. He cannot, and He will not fail. Amen.

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