

The Worthy and Unworthy Communicant

I Corinthians 11:23-29, Maundy Thursday

April 9, 2009

Beloved of the Lord.....We are here this evening to give all honor and praise and glory to the Son of God, who gave His own holy body and blood as a sacrifice for the sins of the world. Tonight by faith in this sacrifice we will receive His holy body and blood "given and shed for you for the remission of sins." "As often as ye eat this bread and drink this cup, ye do show the Lord's death till he come." God's gift of Holy Communion is the gift of God's own body given for the comfort of each troubled soul. This gift to you His disciples is better than the gift of a child through marriage, or the gift of your own beloved wife or husband. Yea in the gift of Holy Communion you receive a gift far greater than all the treasures of this earth, for with the gift of the body and blood of Christ, God gives you Himself, even life everlasting.

Holy Communion a Means of Grace, just like Baptism and the Gospel Word, for in the elements of bread and wine Christ has placed His grace, the forgiveness of sins, hence life everlasting. Holy Communion then stands on its own power, the power of the Gospel, which is "the power of God unto salvation, to every one that believeth." When we commune we should remember it is the Lord Himself who has set this feast before us, His feast of love, and this is same feast He set before His disciples that first night, the same night in which He was betrayed, long ago. When we commune then we should always remember it is the Lord Himself who has set this Table. This is the Lord's Table. Indeed God has set the Bread of Life upon this table. Here is His body. Here is His blood. Regardless of how we approach this table, what is on the table does not change; the bread and wine, the body and blood, which bring to our souls the forgiveness of sins. "The Supper is indeed a means of grace in which God deals with each communicant individually to assure him personally of the forgiveness of all his sins. Therefore we do not go to Communion to earn favor with God, but to receive from Him blessings and benefits for ourselves." (E. Koehler)

"Wherefore whosoever shall eat this bread, and drink this cup of the Lord unworthily, shall be guilt of the body and blood of the Lord." Sometimes we are scared by this verse. We ask ourselves, "Have I been unworthy? Will I be damned?" But the damnation which is threatened in this verse is the judgment of God. Those who go to communion, not discerning the Lord's body, are in danger of God's judgment. An

unworthy or unprepared communicant is one who communes but does not believe or doubts that the body and blood of the Lord are there. Such fall under God's judgment. Thus when we go to communion, we should go with believing hearts, for the true body and blood of Christ are indeed in this Sacrament, for when Jesus gave the bread He literally said, "This is My body" and when Jesus gave the wine He literally said "This is My blood." If then we realize in the past we did not understand or believe this, hence we were unworthy communicants, we should repent of this sin and by all means go to Holy Communion to be forgiven. Even the sin of unbelief is forgiven in this Sacrament and that is why those weak in faith especially should commune.

Often when we consider the term "unworthy communicant" we imagine this concerns how many sins we have committed. Perhaps we compare our worthiness to other Christians and deem ourselves unworthy. But such things do not make us unworthy communicants. The size or number of our sins has nothing to do with our worthiness, nor does worthiness consist in comparison to other Christians. "All have sinned and come short of the glory of God." Even if it were possible to commit only one sin, only one sin merits God's everlasting wrath and eternal damnation. There is therefore no need for either God or us to sort and list and categorize our sins to determine worthiness. We are all dead in trespasses and sins, "But God, who is rich in mercy, for his great love wherewith he loved us, Even when we were dead in sins, hath quickened us together with Christ, (by grace ye are saved)." This is why we approach the Lord's Table - His grace is there, His forgiveness, His mercy. The worthy communicant therefore is nothing more than one who knows he is unworthy of this gift because of his mountain of sins, yet that is the very reason he approaches - for in Holy Communion he finds a mountain of forgiveness in the body and blood of the Lord, an everlasting fountain of mercy and grace "given and shed for you for the remission of sins." Concerning worthy communicants Luther simply said: He is truly worthy and well prepared who has faith in these words, Given and shed for you for the remission of sins.

"But let a man examine himself, and so let him eat of that bread, and drink of that cup." We should not only make sure we believe that the true body and blood of Christ are indeed in, with, and under the bread and wine, we should also make sure we are sorry for our sins. Do we truly repent? Now I know what happens here. Inside we wonder, but how do I know if I am truly sorry? How can I be sure I have repented in the

way the Lord wants? But in the Bible you will not find a list of sacrifices one must do in order to prove their sorrow. While there are many verses which reveal true grief of heart over sin (like sackcloth, ashes or fasting), nowhere does God command these things to prove sorrow of the heart. This is not needed because God knows the heart. Hence David prayed, "Thou desirest not sacrifice; else would I give it: thou delightest not in burnt offering. The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit: a broken and a contrite heart, O God, thou wilt not despise." Simply put, if you are sorry God knows it and He's not going to turn you away! By all means commune!

Regarding communion it is also to understand God does not forgive because we repent. Holy Communion is about His grace GIVEN to you.....it is not about your sorrow toward Him. His forgiveness for you dear sinner began in the past, when you Savior redeemed you with the gift of His own blood! The Bible says "the gifts and calling of God are without repentance." We cannot go to the Table if we are unsure the Gift is there. God therefore first tells us the Gift is there, His body and blood are there for anyone who wishes to be forgiven. Dear troubled sinner, take comfort here! God already knows you are sorry! But it is because He is a merciful and gracious God, that He long ago provided you a perfect Sacrifice for your sins, so that no more sacrifice is needed, the very body and blood of your Savior, Jesus Christ, who on the same night in which He was betrayed took bread and said "Take eat, this is My body!" In this Sacrament God is therefore saying to you, "Please know and be assured I have already forgiven you, for here is My body, here is My blood! These are "given and shed for you for the remission of sins!"

When we take and eat, when we receive the Gift with believing hearts, our soul is strengthened, is it not? It is sad but sometimes we are fearful of communion because we have committed a certain sin, and this sin is very strong in us. We are sorry for this sin and it grieves our heart but we feel powerless to fight it! What then should we do? By all means commune! This brings us to the third part of self-examination: Do we have the good and earnest purpose with the aid of God the Holy Spirit henceforth to amend our sinful lives? Believers always want to stop sinning, but they find no strength within to do so. We then need the help of the Holy Spirit. That's what communion is all about. God helps you to fight your sin, by forgiving you of your sin. But if we or any other person knows something to be a sin, but they absolutely refuse to stop doing it, and refuse to repent of it, such a person has fallen. For where the Holy

Spirit lives, there is always repentance over sin and the earnest desire to amend. But "He who is unwilling to [amend] thereby shows that his repentance is not sincere, for where there is true repentance in the heart, there will be fruits of repentance in life." (Koehler)

In closing, dear soldier of the cross, find the strength you need to continue your battle against sin in Holy Communion. Here, by these means, the Holy Spirit Himself will help you both to will and to do His good pleasure. Commune "to obtain strength for a holier life." In His continual forgiveness and grace you will also find the power to amend. Therefore eat and drink of the Lord's mercy and grace. "For where there is forgiveness of sins, there is also life and salvation!" Come to this Holy Table with thanksgiving! Eat and drink His feast of love! Eat and drink the Bread of Life whose forgiveness will quench the thirst of your soul. For the Lord Jesus Christ the same night in which He was betrayed took bread and said to His disciples, "Take eat, this is my body which is broken for you: this do in remembrance of me." Amen.

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