



The Sacrament of Holy Communion

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The Sacrament of Holy Communion almost has as many names as it does interpretations. It is known as the Lord's Supper, the Eucharist, the Breaking of the Bread, the Fellowship of the Altar, the Sacrament of the Altar, or simply Communion. For many Christians it is either a physical or spiritual meal, but for Lutherans it is both. We walk a fine line when we talk about the Lord's Supper because we strive to only say what Scripture says about it. When the desire arises to have what happens in the Sacrament of the Altar make sense, humanity comes to one of two conclusions. First is the conclusion made by John Calvin, who wrote:

We must establish such a presence of Christ in the Supper as may neither fasten him to the element of bread, nor enclose him in bread, nor circumscribe him in any way (all which things, it is clear, detract from his heavenly glory); finally, such as may not take from him his own stature, or parcel him out to many places at once, or invest him with boundless magnitude to be spread through heaven and earth for those things are plainly in conflict with a truly human Christ. Let us never allow these two limitations to be taken from us: (1) Let nothing be withdrawn from Christ's heavenly glory – as happens when he is brought under the corruptible elements of this world, or bound to any earthly creatures. (2) Let nothing inappropriate to human nature be ascribed to his body, as happens when it is said either to be intimate or to be put in a number of places at once.¹

This view perpetrates that Christ Jesus is physically unable to participate in Holy Communion, because his human form ascended into heaven and sits at the right hand of God the Father. Carrying Calvin's logic to its conclusion, the Southern Baptist Convention confesses: "The Lord's Supper is a symbolic act of obedience whereby members... memorialize the death of the Redeemer and anticipate His second coming."² Holy Communion then is limited to our work of eating and drinking simple bread and wine in memory of the work that Jesus accomplished on the cross. Simply put, the effective work of God in Christ Jesus under the mystery of the Holy Spirit has no place in this interpretation of Holy Communion, which goes against the very words used to institute Holy Communion.³ By taking the divinity of Christ out of the equation there is no guarantee of forgiveness or fellowship with God present at the altar. What is one of the greatest gifts given by God to strengthen faith in the Church and connect the individual to the feast to come is reduced to a ceremony that one participates in.

¹ Calvin, John (ed. Kerr, Hugh T.) *Calvin's Institutes: A New Compendium* Westminster John Knox Press. Louisville, KY 1989 pg. 165

² Southern Baptist Convention *Basic Beliefs* taken from www.sbc.net/aboutus/basicbeliefs.asp accessed 5.11.2015

³ "Take, eat; this is my body... Drink of it, all of you, for this is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins." (Matthew 26:26-28 ESV) "Truly, truly, I say to you, unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink his blood, you have no life in you." (John 6:53 ESV) All Scripture quotations are from The Holy Bible, English Standard Version, copyright 2011 by Crossway Bibles, a division of Good News Publishers. Used by permission. All rights reserved.

The second interpretation that human reason comes to is that of Roman Catholicism. If the Reformed Church under John Calvin overemphasizes how the humanity of Jesus cannot be present in Holy Communion, then Rome overemphasizes the transcendence of the divinity of Christ and his sacrifice in this meal. When a Roman church celebrates Holy Communion they believe that the bread and wine are merely the appearance of the Body and Blood of Christ.⁴ They believe that the process by which this change happens is called “transubstantiation.”⁵ What the communicants are left with is “the living Christ who is present, that is, His Body, Blood, Soul, and Divinity... both under the appearance of bread and under the appearance of wine.”⁶ When asked if the appearance of the bread or wine has changed, Rome’s response is, “The appearances of the bread and wine (taste, smell, color, size, shape, weight) did not change, even though the bread and wine were actually changed into the Body and Blood of Jesus.”⁷

We disagree with both the Roman teaching that the bread and wine is completely replaced with Body and Blood and the Reformed teaching that it is purely bread and wine. However, we must acknowledge Rome to be correct over the Reformed position when it comes to what occurs for the participants of this Sacramental Meal: the eating of the Body and Blood of Jesus truly forgives, strengthens faith, and removes the wrath of God from the believer.⁸

However, Rome then pushes this simple teaching further by calling it a sacrifice – a sacrifice that is celebrated daily in the Roman church. While Rome acknowledges that this is not a “re-sacrifice” of Christ, we must ask why their teaching is so muddled as to be confused with what appears to be a daily re-sacrifice. For example, in the *Official Catholic Teachings: A Catechism for Adults* we find: “What is the Mass? It is the *renewal* of the sacrifice of the Cross, the sacrifice of the Body and Blood of Jesus Christ, offered in an unbloody manner under the appearances of bread and wine.”⁹ Following this up it continues: “Is the Mass a true sacrifice? Yes, it contains all the elements of a true sacrifice, priest and victim – gift and offering. By the separate consecration of the bread and wine which symbolizes His death, Jesus the victim of the Calvary Sacrifice, becomes truly present on the altar.”¹⁰ The comprehensive *Catechism of the Catholic Church* goes on to state that: the Mass is called a divine sacrifice¹¹, that the

⁴ Cogan, Rev. William J. *Official Catholic Teachings: A Catechism for Adults* Cogan Publications. Aurora, IL 2000. Pg. 68 | Under the copyright notice of this book there is a further disclaimer: “This book contains the teachings of the Roman Catholic Church, Pope John Paul II, Supreme Pontiff. Published in accordance with the new code of Canon Law and the universal *Catechism of the Catholic Church*.”

⁵ The Holy See *Catechism of the Catholic Church: Complete and Updated* (tr. United States Catholic Conference Inc. 1994) Double Day Publishing, 1995. Question 1105

⁶ Cogan, pg. 69

⁷ Cogan, pg. 69

⁸ *Catechism of the Catholic Church*. Question 1367

⁹ Cogan, pg. 73 (emphasis added)

¹⁰ Cogan, pg. 74

¹¹ *Catechism of the Catholic Church* (from this point forward CCC). Question 1068

sacrifice of Christ and the sacrifice of the Eucharist are one single sacrifice¹², that it is done over and over again¹³, that it is an unbloody offering that is propitiatory¹⁴, that it can make reparation of sins¹⁵, and is to be considered a true and proper sacrifice.¹⁶ Again:

Is the Sacrifice of the Mass the same as the sacrifice of the Cross? Yes, they are the same in that the victim and the priest are the same, Jesus Christ. What is the difference between the two sacrifices? The difference is that the Sacrifice of the Cross was a bloody sacrifice, while the Sacrifice of the Mass is an unbloody one.¹⁷

It seems as if the Eucharist *completes* Calvary; whereas in Lutheran theology, the Eucharist *delivers* Calvary. Even the most devout defenders of Roman dogma must agree that if Christ is *neither* being re-sacrificed *nor* is the onetime crucifixion event continuously being “renewed”¹⁸ by its proper definition on this altar during the Sacrifice of the Mass, then in the very least there seems to be a disconnect between the doctrine written on the page and Rome’s public practice.

By now you are probably asking yourself: “What is the Lutheran teaching and understanding of Holy Communion?” Both Rome and the Reformed understandings of Holy Communion ignore the possibility that what is given in Holy Communion could be both bread and Body and both wine and Blood. We believe, teach, and confess that in the Sacrament of Holy Communion the Body and Blood of Jesus Christ are present with the bread and wine under the mystery of the Holy Spirit. What does that mean? We strive to maintain the tension that is taught throughout Scripture. When Jesus instituted this Sacrament, we read that:

He took bread, and after blessing it broke it and gave it to them, and said, ‘Take; this is my body.’ And he took a cup, and when he had given thanks he gave it to them, and they all drank of it. And he said to them, ‘This is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many. Truly, I say to you, I will not drink again of the fruit of the vine until that day when I drink it new in the kingdom of God.’¹⁹

In that short passage we are able to see the tension. Jesus calls what is obviously baked bread his Body. Jesus also calls what is in the cup both his Blood and the fruit of the vine. St. Paul also says in 1 Corinthians 11, “Whoever, therefore, eats the bread or drinks the cup of the Lord

¹² CCC. Question 1367

¹³ CCC. Question 1068

¹⁴ CCC. Question 1367

¹⁵ CCC. Question 1414

¹⁶ New Advent: Sacrifice of the Mass <http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/10006a.htm> Accessed May 13, 2015

¹⁷ Cogan, pg. 75

¹⁸ Which by definition means: “1 resume or reestablish after an interruption. 2 give fresh life or strength to. 3 extend the period of validity of a license, subscription, or contract. 4 replace or restore.” Ed. Judy Pearsall *The Concise Oxford English Dictionary* Oxford University Press. New York, NY 2002 | Note that three of the definitions strongly imply an “expiration date” on what is being renewed (1, 3, and 4). While the remaining definition (2) flat out says that the original was not enough – I believe it’s safe to say that Rome rejects this aspect of the word.

¹⁹ Mark 14:22-25 ESV

in an unworthy manner will be guilty concerning the body and blood of the Lord.” Again we have this paradox. Body and bread. Blood and wine. How can this be? The correct answer is, we don’t know. We humble ourselves to the witness of the Word of God and allow God the Holy Spirit to work in this miracle.

Since it is the Father’s will that we eat the Body and Blood of his Son Jesus with the bread and wine by the mysterious working of the Holy Spirit, we can say that the fullness of God – the very Holy Trinity itself is present with us at the altar. And because it is God who is working this for us, we can with certainty say that we are receiving the most wonderful of gifts. In what follows, we will take a closer look at what gifts are given to the Church, the history of our practice of closed communion, why we follow such a rigorous form of liturgy, and what this means in the life of a Christian.

The Gifts of Holy Communion:

One is hard pressed to find a better summary of what gifts are given in Holy Communion than in the words of Dr. Luther’s *Small Catechism*, “The words ‘given for you’ and ‘shed for you for the forgiveness of sins’ show us that forgiveness of sins, life, and salvation are given to us in the sacrament through these words, because where there is forgiveness of sin, there is also life and salvation.”²⁰ These simple words communicate the gracious gift that was given in the Upper Room during the Passover – and it is very important to note that the institution of Holy Communion came during the Passover. The great religious rite of Old Testament Israel was celebrated first in Egypt where God enacted judgment on sinners – while passing over the sins of Israel and delivering the chosen people from condemnation.²¹ Nafzger weighs in on this significance: “In a setting rich in the meaning of God’s deliverance of His people through the blood of a lamb, the Lamb of God gives a testament in His body and blood in, with, and under the Passover elements of bread and wine for the forgiveness of sins.”²²

What was once God turning a blind eye to his people’s sin is now God looking fondly at his people through the sacrifice of his Son and speaking forgiveness. In addition to forgiveness, Chemnitz lists five things that are given to believers in the Lord’s Supper:

1. We are partakers of the merit of Christ and are included in the New Testament covenant of grace.
2. Everyone might surely conclude that this universal promise applies specifically also to himself... Christ Himself offers and gives to every individual His body and blood, beaming at every individual with a personal invitation ‘for the remission of sins.’
3. Remembrance of the death of Christ, which consists in true repentance and faith, must be preserved, strengthened, and increased in us.
4. We often fall from the covenant and pact of grace through sin against

²⁰ Kolb, Robert and Wengert, Timothy J. eds. *The Book of Concord: The Confessions of the Evangelical Lutheran Church* Fortress Press. Minneapolis, MN 2000. The Small Catechism: Sacrament of the Altar ¶16

²¹ Exodus 11 and 12

²² Nafzger, Samuel H. *Close Communion in the Missouri Synod* The Lutheran Witness, May Issue 1993

conscience, therefore, so that in true conversion we might have sure and special evidence, besides the general Word, that God is willing to receive us anew into that covenant of Grace, Christ says in His Supper: ... new testament of my blood... 5. Christ, in His Supper, offers us His most holy body and blood, so that, engrafted by this communion as branches in Him who is the true vine, we might draw thence new, good, and spiritual sap. Thus we are also joined most closely by this communion with other Christians as members of the one body of Christ, so that mutual love toward the neighbor is kindled, increased, and preserved in us.²³

While certainly more comprehensive than Luther's simple "forgiveness, life, and salvation," each of these gifts has their root in that forgiveness. The believer can take heart that with forgiveness indeed comes: partaking in Christ's merit, bringing the universal gospel down to the single individual Christian, the strengthening of faith, the continued reconciliation with the Father, and the communion of the saints in Christ's Church.

When Christians kneel before the altar to receive Christ's body and blood they should note that Christ is truly present and working (how he is working for unbelievers will be discussed later). No matter how strong or weak their faith, Christians still receive the fullness of Christ. The Christian who has little faith does not receive a smaller or lesser portion of forgiveness. As Luther writes: "When [Christ] says, 'Do this,' (namely, what I now do, what I institute, what I give you and bid you take), this is as much as to say, 'No matter whether you are worthy or unworthy, you have here his body and blood by the power of these words that are connected to the bread and wine.'"²⁴ This gift is for the faithful, yet received by everyone partaking because faith does not make Christ's body and blood present in the Sacrament any more than the infant's appetite makes the oatmeal present in the dish.²⁵ This also applies to the called pastor leading the service. It does not matter how holy or unholy, how righteous or unrighteous he is, no human effort affects the presence of the body and blood of Christ in the Holy Supper. This work is attributed solely and alone to the almighty power of our Lord Jesus Christ.²⁶ It is Christ, not we, who creates the reality of the Lord's Supper. Our work of eating and drinking do not accomplish the work of Jesus, but rather the power of the words 'given for you' and 'shed for you for the forgiveness of your sin.'²⁷ In this way, Christians do participate by simply receiving what God has done. The real work (as is the case with Baptism and Absolution) is being done by the Father through his Son's work and word under the mystery of the Spirit.

This work is first individualized, because wherever and whenever Jesus is present, He desires to forgive your sins. Jesus' real presence in the Lord's Supper is cause enough for us to

²³ Chemnitz, Martin (tr. Poellot, Luther) *Ministry, Word, and Sacrament: An Enchiridion* Concordia Publishing House. St. Louis, MO. 1981 Question 274

²⁴ Large Catechism: Sacrament of the Altar ¶18

²⁵ Kolb, pg. 237

²⁶ Formula of Concord, Epitome: VII:8

²⁷ Small Catechism: Sacrament of the Altar ¶18

know that His forgiveness is present. Whenever Christ Jesus is truly present, life and salvation are also present.²⁸ This is not some “spiritual forgiveness.” What a believer is given in the Supper is a complete forgiveness of their entire being – both body and soul. As Cyril of Alexandria says:

We do not deny that we are joined spiritually to Christ by true faith and sincere love. But we do entirely deny that we have no kind of connection with him according to the flesh. We say that this is foreign to the Sacred Scriptures... from this we must consider that Christ is in us not only according to the indwelling understood as love but also by a natural participation.²⁹

The believer can look to their reception of the body and blood of Jesus as the moment that all of their senses are overwhelmed by God. They see the body and blood. They smell the fruit of the vine and wheat. They hear the words, “Your sins are forgiven.” They feel the bread and chalice. They taste and truly see that the Lord is good. The Lord’s Supper confirms and seals the private absolution to the individual by making them the recipient of the very body of Christ which was given for them and of the very blood which Christ shed for them.³⁰

After knowing that your sins of both body and soul are forgiven, the Holy Spirit also strengthens your faith. Our faith is to be understood as one which recognizes that by ourselves we are broken – yet in Christ we are a new creation. So we consistently celebrate and partake in the Lord’s Supper to acknowledge that we are sinful and need the Savior Jesus. Melancthon discusses how the Spirit strengthens our faith and reliance on Jesus:

We celebrate the memory of the death of Christ. You hear that the body of Christ has been given for you. You hear that the blood of Christ has been shed for you. These words first instruct us regarding the great anger of God against our sins, which the virtues and merits of neither angels nor men could placate, but which must be placated by the death of the Son... Furthermore, there is also the necessity for faith which seeks and receives the remission of sins. For here in the Sacrament the remission of sins is offered and applied to the believer.³¹

Our lives on this earth are a continuous cycle of repentance and forgiveness. Faith sees the reality of our corrupted nature and knows that we deserve punishment. Yet faith also looks to the cross to see how God has pulled us out of the depths. Faith knows that receiving Christ’s body and blood sustains and uplifts and strengthens. Faith cannot walk away from this table without recognizing how good God is. He has not only given himself into death that we might have life. He has shared that death and life with us. He has done so in several ways, but at the

²⁸ Engelbrecht, Edward A. ed. *The Lutheran Difference: 500th Anniversary of the Reformation* Concordia Publishing House. St. Louis, MO. 2014 pg. 428

²⁹ Cyril of Alexandria *On the Gospel according to St. John* 10, 2 (MPG 74:341) – commentating on John 15:1 against the Arians

³⁰ Pieper, Francis *Christian Dogmatics: Vol. 3* Concordia Publishing House. St. Louis, MO. 1953 pg. 293

³¹ Melancthon, Philip (tr. Preus, J.A.O.) *The Chief Theological Topics: Loci Praecipui Theologici 1559* Concordia Publishing House. St. Louis, MO 2011 pg. 273

table we see him coming to feed us with life itself.³² Believers cannot help but take deep delight in the love of such a Father.³³

Since we confess that we are simultaneously both sinner and saint – we must recognize that the good work that God has begun in our baptism is not complete until the day of the resurrection.³⁴ Therefore, we must always be ready to humble ourselves and confess that we are sinners who need this gracious gift. We cannot receive the Lord’s Supper enough. This is why Luther was very blunt when he encountered those who were lazy in their reception:

For a person to absent oneself or abstain from the Sacrament for an extended period of time harms their faith – possibly resulting in the loss of faith. Christ did not institute the Sacrament for us to treat it as a spectacle, but he commanded his Christians to eat and drink and thereby remember him.³⁵

Much discussion could be had over the duration of “an extended period of time” but it is the author’s belief that a Christian should at least receive the Sacrament once a month. It is important for the entirety of a Christian (i.e. mind, body, soul, and faith) to consistently receive the Supper. However, it is also important to note that the Formula addresses those concerned with their salvation by saying, “No genuine believers – no matter how weak – as long as they retain a living faith, receive the Holy Supper as condemnation. For Christ instituted this supper particularly for Christians who are weak in faith but repentant, to comfort them and to strengthen their weak faith.”³⁶ The importance then is recognizing that we have sinned against God and one another, confessing this sin either in our heart or with our mouth, and seeking the forgiveness that is found only in Christ Jesus. Through faith in Christ, God the Father is always welcoming and forgives sinners.

In his Supper, Christ serves his people his own body and blood. In so doing, he joins them to himself, to his own death and to his own resurrection.³⁷ The Supper does make us family not only with the Father but also with his other children. It establishes and reminds us of the unbreakable association God has forged between us and them.³⁸ The believer cannot help but think of Jesus words:

I am the true vine, and my Father is the vinedresser. Every branch in me that does not bear fruit he takes away, and every branch that does bear fruit he prunes, that it may bear more fruit. Already you are clean because of the word that I have spoken to you. Abide in me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit by itself, unless it abides in the vine, neither can you, unless you

³² John 6:51

³³ Kolb, pg. 237

³⁴ Philippians 1:6

³⁵ Large Catechism: Sacrament of the Altar ¶142

³⁶ Formula of Concord, Epitome: VII:19

³⁷ Kolb, pg. 235

³⁸ Kolb, pg. 238

abide in me. I am the vine; you are the branches. Whoever abides in me and I in him, he it is that bears much fruit, for apart from me you can do nothing... This is my commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you.³⁹

Contained in this excerpt is both Jesus comparing the Church to a vine that grows out of him, but also one of the most terrifying passages of Scripture, “Love one another as I have loved you.” This sin, too, is forgiven by Christ in the Supper, but we must recognize that the real presence also means the real power of Christ. We try and seek community with one another, but more often we are divisive and tear one another down. The Lord’s Supper calls us to be community, empowers us in community, and enables us to maintain community. Real community flows from Christ’s selfless love and sacrificing power.⁴⁰ The same selfless love and sacrificing we should be doing for one another. This communion that we share with Christ and one another also transcends time and the shadow of death.⁴¹

When participating in the Sacrament, Christians receive all of the gracious gifts that God offers – the chief of which is the forgiveness of their sin.

Proper Practice and Close Communion:

Since a Christian believes that the true body and blood of Christ are both offered to and received by upright, repentant Christians and evil, unrepentant “Christians”⁴² we take seriously the command of Jesus to love our neighbors as ourselves.⁴³ What this means is that in order to prevent some from being “guilty concerning the body and blood of the Lord”⁴⁴ and “drinking judgment”⁴⁵ upon themselves, we only admit those who know what they are seeking in this meal and understand why they desire to come to it.⁴⁶ The Lutheran Church – Missouri Synod⁴⁷ practices “close communion,” which means only those who are baptized, believe that Christ’s body and blood are verily present with the bread and wine, are repentant, believe that Christ gave his body and shed his blood for the forgiveness of sins, and are members in good standing with the LC-MS (or a member of a church body in fellowship with us) are welcome to the Altar. In today’s world this seems to usually be perceived as unfriendly, ungracious, inhospitable, un-American, and even unloving. There are those who would even argue that refusing someone from the Table of the Lord is contrary to Scripture. However, when one takes a closer look at

³⁹ John 15:1-5, 12 (ESV)

⁴⁰ *The Lutheran Difference*, pg. 433

⁴¹ Isaiah 25:6-9, Hebrews 12:1-2

⁴² Smalcald Articles 3:6:1 (See also: LC Sacrament of the Altar ¶169 “It is true that those who despise the Sacrament and lead unchristian lives receive it to their harm and damnation.”)

⁴³ Matthew 22:39

⁴⁴ 1 Corinthians 11:27

⁴⁵ 1 Corinthians 11:29

⁴⁶ Large Catechism: Sacrament of the Altar ¶12

⁴⁷ We practice this along with the Roman church, the Orthodox churches, and some conservative Evangelicals.

Scripture and reads the Church Fathers⁴⁸, one begins to see that close communion⁴⁹ always has been⁵⁰ and continues to be⁵¹ a loving guard to protect potential participants from harm. Looking at Scripture's account of Holy Communion, we draw out two points of proper practice: first, communing worthily and unworthily and second, Communion as a confession of faith.

Communing Worthily and Unworthily

The primary source of the doctrine on Holy Communion comes from St. Paul's first letter to the Corinthians. The opening paragraph of Paul's exposition of Holy Communion and its proper practice begins by setting Holy Communion up as the plumb line for Christians who partake. Paul writes in 11:18-22:

For, in the first place, when you come together as a church, I hear that there are divisions among you. And I believe it in part, for there must be factions among you in order that those who are genuine among you may be recognized. When you come together, it is not the Lord's Supper that you eat. For in eating, each one goes ahead with his own meal. One goes hungry, another gets drunk. What! Do you not have houses to eat and drink in? Or do you despise the church of God and humiliate those who have nothing? What shall I say to you? Shall I commend you in this? No, I will not. (ESV)

Paul has the foresight to know that there are those inside the Church who are not truly Christian. Those not Christian attend the Table of the Lord with true believers. If it were not

⁴⁸ "This food is called among us the Eucharist, of which no one is allowed to partake but the man who believes that the things which we teach are true, and who has been washed with the washing that is for the remission of sins, and unto regeneration, and who is so living as Christ has enjoined." – Justin Martyr | ed. Roberts, Alexander and Donaldson, James *Ante-Nicene Fathers Volume 1* Hendrickson Publishers. Peabody, MA 1995 pg. 185

⁴⁹ "[Christ's] death gives life, His burial gives resurrection. Therefore, He is a rich treasure, for His bread is rich. And 'rich' is apt for one who has eaten this bread will be unable to feel hunger. He gave it to the Apostles to distribute to a *believing* people, and today He gives it to us, for He, as a priest, daily consecrates it with His own words. Therefore, this bread has become the food of the *saints*." (emphasis added) Ambrose of Milan *On the Patriarchs* 9, 38

⁵⁰ "It terrifies me to hear that in one and the same church or at one and the same altar both parties are to find and to receive one and the same Sacrament and one party is to believe that it receives nothing but bread and wine, while the other is to believe that it receives the true body and blood of Christ. And I often wonder whether it is credible that a preacher or shepherd of souls can be so hardened and malicious as to say nothing about this and let both parties go on in this way, receiving one and the same Sacrament, everyone according to his own faith, etc. If such a person exists, he must have a heart harder than any stone, steel, or adamant. He must, in fact, be an apostle of wrath. Whoever, therefore, has such preachers or suspects them to be such, let him be warned against them as against the devil incarnate himself." – Martin Luther | *That These Words of Christ, 'This is My Body' Still Stand Firm Against the Fanatics, 1527*, in Luther's Works, Word and Sacrament III, 1961, Fortress Press, volume 37, p. 54

⁵¹ "For everyone to be admitted to the Lord's Supper, without distinction or selection, is a sign of contempt that the Lord cannot endure. The Lord himself distributed the supper to his disciples only....No one should be distressed when his Christianity is examined even down to the finest point when he is to be admitted to the Lord's Supper. It should be established as part of the total state and system of discipline that ought to flourish in the church that those who are judged unworthy should not be admitted." – John Calvin | "Letter on Various Subjects" in the book *Calvin's Ecclesiastical Advice*. From: <http://www.puritandownloads.com/swrb/categories/Lord%27s-Supper-%28Communion%29/>

for Holy Communion there would be no imperative for the Church to compel its members into a life of repentance and grace. This “plumb line” encourages all Christians to help one another in word and teach each other in deed. In comment of this text, the Church Father Ambrosiaster wrote: “Paul did not want heresies or choose them, but he foresaw the future and knew that they would come.”⁵² It is at the Communion Table where the faithful are approved and the faithless are detected.⁵³ Without the public distinction (i.e. those who are publically unrepentant of their sin and put themselves over Scripture compared against those who are publically repentant and humble before Scripture), we would not know who are true Christians and who are not. Participation in Communion compels the Church to know which of us needs further education or correction so that we may lovingly guard and prevent anyone in the Church from drinking the cup of damnation instead of the cup of life.

Paul elaborates on this distinction in the second half of the paragraph. He tells the Corinthians that they are not properly celebrating the Lord’s Supper. They join together to do whatever they like, leaving some to go hungry while others get drunk. He points out their grievous sin in order to bring about their repentance and change of behavior. He specifically calls them out for not being genuine Christians – those who are self-serving do not stand up with the plumb line that is Holy Communion, because a Christian is to be a servant of all for the sake of love.⁵⁴

Paul then moves to the Words of Institution and the confessional aspect of the Lord’s Supper found in vv23-26:

For I received from the Lord what I also delivered to you, that the Lord Jesus on the night when he was betrayed took bread, and when he had given thanks, he broke it, and said, “This is my body which is for you. Do this in remembrance of me.” In the same way also he took the cup, after supper, saying, “This cup is the new covenant in my blood. Do this, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of me.” For as often as you eat this bread and drink the cup, *you proclaim* the Lord’s death until he comes. (ESV – emphasis added)

This passage establishes a proper order – what the Lord gave to Paul, Paul gave to the Fathers, and the Fathers gave to us. This Sacrament was passed down so that those who confess and believe in Christ can be shown God’s forgiveness and have their faith strengthened by participating in this meal. Moreover, St. Paul specifically says that taking part in this sacramental meal is a proclamation of our Lord’s death until he returns. The fact that we are publicly confessing Christ’s death and resurrection at the Altar with our fellow believers joins us together as one family. When one takes the Sacrament, one shows that they accept the

⁵² Ed. Bray, Gerald *Ancient Christian Commentary on Scripture: New Testament Vol. VII: 1-2 Corinthians*. InterVarsity Press. Downers Grove, IL 1999 pg. 110 (henceforth known as *Ancient Christian Commentary*)

⁵³ St. Cyprian, *Ancient Christian Commentary*, pg. 110

⁵⁴ Ephesians 5:20,21

teaching of Christ's church and desire membership in Christ's congregation.⁵⁵ Nafzger points out that "participation in the Sacrament is itself an act of confession. We, therefore, should not commune with those with whom we disagree in the confession of the Gospel, lest we say one thing with our words and another with our actions (Matthew 23:3)." He continues by laying the imperative at our feet to bring the entire family of faith together, "The pain of brothers and sisters in Christ not being able to proclaim together Christ's death in Holy Communion ought to compel us not to rest until our differences in confessing the Gospel of Jesus Christ are resolved and we can join one another at God's altar." We desire and pray that the entire Church comes together, but for the sake of love we cannot allow all to participate in Communion. If we did, both we and they run the risk of drinking the cup of judgment.

Earlier in his letter, Paul gives us a look at someone who is taking part in the community of Christ unworthily. They are self-serving and as thus Paul condemns them. 1 Corinthians chapter five is strong scriptural support for close communion and how we are to examine ourselves and our relationships within the body of the Church. In it, St. Paul addresses the open, unrepentant, and public sin of a man. The entirety of this chapter is dedicated to the topic of who is welcome to those "assembled in the name of the Lord Jesus."⁵⁶ Paul begins by addressing the man specifically, "It is actually reported that there is sexual immorality among you, and of a kind that is not tolerated even among pagans, for a man has his father's wife."⁵⁷ Immediately following this Paul says, "Let him who has done this be removed from among you."⁵⁸ Toward the end of the chapter Paul writes:

I wrote to you in my letter not to associate with sexually immoral people – not at all meaning the sexually immoral of this world, or the greedy and swindlers, or idolaters, since then you would need to go out of the world. But now I am writing to you not to associate with anyone who bears the name of brother (i.e. Christian), *should he be* sexually immoral or greedy, or an idolater, reviler, drunkard, or swindler – not even to eat with such a one. For what have I to do with judging outsiders? Is it not those inside the church whom you are to judge? God judges those outside.⁵⁹

We could spend a lot of time on this paragraph⁶⁰, but the part I would like to draw your attention to is the line "should he be." This paragraph combined with the prescription Paul

⁵⁵ Melancthon, pg. 276

⁵⁶ 1 Corinthians 5:4 The Church assembles in the Name of the Lord Jesus when they worship together. It is clearly in reference to when they hear the Word and receive the Sacrament of the Altar.

⁵⁷ 1 Corinthians 5:1

⁵⁸ 1 Corinthians 5:2

⁵⁹ 1 Corinthians 5:9-13 (Emphasis added)

⁶⁰ That is: 1. Emphasizing the community of the Church and how one member's sin effects all believers; 2. That Christians aren't to judge the actions of the world – they are to preach Christ to them; 3. That Christians are expected to help each other live the Christian life; 4. How we associate with those inside/outside the community of faith; etc.

makes in verse one illustrates the publically known, unrepentant behavior on the part of the “brother.” A Christian is one who struggles against the natural impulses, lusts, and selfish desires of their old-selves, simply because of the new-selves they received from Christ Jesus in their Baptism are constantly opposed to such behavior.⁶¹ If we (as members of the Church) witness a Christian who is not struggling against their old desires and is living a licentious life that embraces their sin, we are called to judge them as unworthy of receiving Holy Communion – removing them from the service (v. 2), pronouncing the judgment of God’s Law (v. 3), possibly excommunicating them from the Church (v. 4), and even handing them over to Satan for their destruction (v.5). It should be specified that these things do not happen all at once; there is a prescription of how to approach a brother or sister sinning that can be found in Matthew 18. What is clear is that all of this is done so that “his spirit may be saved in the Day of the Lord” (v. 5). The Church wields the Law to bring about the repentance of all human beings – especially those in the community of faith.

From 1 Corinthians five, it is clear that there are instances where an unworthy participant would be excluded from both the fellowship of believers and the Sacrament of the Altar. It is for this reason that we believe that communing is not a right to be assumed or demanded from the Church, but a privilege based upon proper preparation.⁶² When a person turns a blind eye to their own sin and does not repent they are in danger of receiving God’s wrath. This compounds when a congregation turns a blind eye to an individual’s public sin – that congregation runs the risk of receiving as strong a rebuke as Paul gave the Corinthians. Instead, both the congregation and the individuals who make it up should genuinely and honestly reflect on their sin, repent of it, and then receive worthily the gracious gift of Holy Communion.

Returning our attention to the third paragraph of chapter eleven (vv27-32), Paul lays out the dangers of not following what has been handed down. He provides us with an elaborate warning against eating and drinking unworthily and he adds in that each of us is to discern the body of Christ:

Whoever, therefore, eats the bread or drinks the cup of the Lord in an unworthy manner will be guilty concerning the body and blood of the Lord. Let a person examine himself, then, and so eat of the bread and drink of the cup. For anyone who eats and drinks without discerning the body eats and drinks judgment on himself. That is why many of you are weak and ill, and some have died. But if we judged ourselves truly, we would not be judged. But when we are judged by the Lord, we are disciplined so that we may not be condemned along with the world. (ESV)

This clearly warns those who would eat and drink in an unworthy manner to avoid the Lord’s Supper. While we have many definitions of what may be “unworthy” in church today, we must

⁶¹ Galatians 5:17ff

⁶² *The Lutheran Difference*, pg. 418

look past ourselves to how the Church traditionally defined it. John Chrysostom wrote: “It is because someone who profanes the supper is like a priest who pours the blood out, making the death appear to be a slaughter and not a sacrifice. It is like those who pierced Jesus on the cross. They did not do it in order to drink his blood but in order to shed it. The person who comes to the supper unworthily does much the same thing and gains nothing by it.”⁶³ In the same way, St. Augustine says that the one who receives unworthily truly receives in mockery and contempt.⁶⁴ Chemnitz gives three examples of what constitutes unworthy eating and drinking:

The following are they that eat unworthily, as one can very clearly gather from Paul in 1 Corinthians 11: 1. They that do not discern the body of the Lord, that is they that do not hold that the very sacred food of this Supper is the body and blood of Christ, but handle and use it with no greater reverence and devotion than other common foods. 2. They that continue in sins without repentance and have and retain not the intent to lead a better life, but rather to continue in sin, as Paul rebukes this very thing. 3. They that come to this Supper without true faith, namely they that either seek the grace of God, forgiveness of sins, and eternal salvation elsewhere than alone in the merit of Christ.⁶⁵

Church teaching has always expected the local pastors to protect their congregation from harm.⁶⁶ As the under-shepherd, he cannot judge his congregation except where sin is manifest. It becomes their responsibility to prohibit those who are polluted with manifest sins and refuse to repent.⁶⁷ It is also their responsibility to determine the doctrine and faith of individuals among the people.⁶⁸

In a similar way, it is the responsibility of individuals among the congregation to confess their faith and demonstrate what they truly believe regarding doctrine.⁶⁹ When one receives the Lord’s Supper worthily, they do it because they are reverent in mind – possessing the fear of God – so that they may understand whose body and blood they are coming to consume.⁷⁰ John Chrysostom elaborates how one approaches worthily:

It is unlawful for us to touch the table with profane lusts, which are more harmful than diseases. By profane lusts I mean those of the body, of money, of anger, of malice, and so on. It is fitting for anyone who approaches to empty himself of all these things first and then touch that pure sacrament. In your conscience, where no one is present except God who sees all, there judge yourself, examine your sins. When you reflect upon your whole life, bring your sins to the court

⁶³ ACC, pg. 115

⁶⁴ ACC, pg. 116

⁶⁵ Chemnitz, Question 277

⁶⁶ John 21:15-17; 1 Timothy 3:1-7

⁶⁷ Melancthon, pg. 276

⁶⁸ Melancthon, pg. 277

⁶⁹ 1 Peter 3:15

⁷⁰ Ambrosiaster ACC, pg. 116

of mind. Correct your mistakes, and in this way, with a clean conscience, touch the sacred table and participate.⁷¹

We further hone this statement with these criteria: that one must be baptized, can honestly examine themselves, believe the Words of Institution, and have no public offence attributed to them without their repentance.⁷² Truly those who are repentant of their sin and not living open, public lives of sin are eating and drinking worthily. John Chrysostom goes on to warn us and show how judgment is received:

How can the table which is the cause of so many blessings, and which is teeming with life, become a cause for judgment? It is not from its own nature, says Paul, but because of the attitude of the one who comes to it. For just as the presence of Christ, which conveyed to us those great and unspeakable blessings, condemned those who did not receive them, so also the Holy Communion becomes a means of greater punishment to those who partake unworthily.⁷³

Special consideration must also be placed on verse 32 in the text: “But when we are judged by the Lord, we are disciplined so that we may not be condemned along with the world.” God does not wish to give us judgment and wrath when we commune, he desires us to repent of our sin and receive forgiveness. Paul is encouraging us to educate ourselves about human nature.⁷⁴ We are truly fallen. We are truly broken. In the Lord’s Supper we are given a concrete means to receive forgiveness. As Christians, we are called to submit to one another and repent – God will always grant forgiveness to those who do so.

Communion as Confession of Faith

It has been stated above that when Christians gather around the altar they are making a public confession regardless of denomination. The discussion that Paul has with the Church in 1 Corinthians 11 is a continuation of what he says in chapter 10:

Therefore, my beloved, flee from idolatry. I speak as to sensible people; judge for yourselves what I say. 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. Consider the people of Israel: are not those who eat sacrifices participants in the altar? What do I imply then? That food offered to idols is anything, or that an idol is anything? No, I imply that what pagans sacrifice they offer to demons and not to God. I do not want you to be participants with demons. You cannot drink the cup of the Lord and the cup of demons. Shall we provoke the Lord to jealousy? Are we stronger than he?⁷⁵

⁷¹ ACC, pg. 116

⁷² Pieper, pg. 383, 384

⁷³ ACC, pg. 117

⁷⁴ Clement of Alexandria ACC, pg. 117

⁷⁵ 1 Corinthians 10:14-22

What our call as a Christian persuades us to do is look at each denomination's confession of faith and judge them according to Scripture. I began this effort with critiques of both the Calvinist and Roman traditions of Holy Communion and why we take umbrage with their confessions. While other denominations are far from being "demons," we must take Paul's exhortation to speak and act of one accord seriously. We, as Christians in the Lutheran tradition, compromise our confession when we participate at others' altars or allow others to participate at our altars. This is often met with the following criticism: "Well, if we all agree that Jesus saved us by dying for us, and if we all believe that the body and blood of Jesus are truly present, then that's certainly enough agreement on doctrine to commune together." Our response is to ask the question: "What should the church's confession of faith look like?"

Answering that question begins a walk through the New Testament. We first look to the opening chapter of 1 Corinthians, because Paul focuses on the unity of the Church and proper practice of Holy Communion throughout the letter. "I appeal to you, brothers, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that all of you agree, and that there be no divisions among you, but that you be united in the same mind and the same judgment."⁷⁶ Paul challenges the Corinthians' divisions and then resolves them with the Gospel. Paul says that they should "agree" to the point of there being "no divisions" – not to "agree to disagree," as inter-denominational communion would imply. While beliefs that Jesus is Lord and his body and blood are present in some way at the Lord's Table enable us to call others brothers and sisters, it is not enough to publically confess the faith as the same.

In 1 Corinthians 12, Paul explains what that unity looks like:

For just as the body is *one* and has many members, and all the members of the body, though many, are *one* body, so it is with Christ. For in *one* Spirit we were all baptized into *one* body – Jews or Greeks, slaves or free – and all were made to drink of *one* Spirit... Now you are the body of Christ and individually members of it.⁷⁷

When the Church gathers, it is to be in agreement just like all the physical appendages of a human body work together for the good of that body. Paul builds on this in his letter to the Ephesians:

There is one body and one Spirit – just as you were called to the one home that belongs to your call – one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all... And he gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the shepherds and teachers, to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ, until we all attain to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to mature manhood, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ, so that we may no longer be children, tossed to and fro by the waves and carried about by every wind of doctrine, by human cunning,

⁷⁶ 1 Corinthians 1:10

⁷⁷ 1 Corinthians 12:12-13, 27 (emphasis added)

by craftiness in deceitful schemes. Rather, speaking the truth in love, we are to grow up in every way into him who is the head, into Christ, from whom the whole body, joined and held together by every joint with which it is equipped, when each part is working properly, makes the body grow so that it builds itself up in love.⁷⁸

Both of these are brilliant passages on what it means for the Church to be “one.” Specifically mentioned as part of this oneness is doctrine. We are not to be carried about by every wind of doctrine. Rather, we are to speak the truth in love for our brothers and sisters. Permitting other denominations to commune with us is ignoring what Paul says here about our task of guarding doctrine and speaking the truth in love. We are not speaking the truth in love if we give and receive the Sacrament unworthily or participate with a denomination that does not share our confession in unity.

In John’s gospel account Jesus makes even more intimate the unity that is supposed to be shared within the Church by comparing it to his relationship with God the Father:

And I am no longer in the world, but [my disciples] are in the world, and I am coming to you. Holy Father, keep them in your name, which you have given me, that they may be *one*, even as we are *one*... I do not ask for these [my disciples] only, but also for those who will believe in me through their word, that they may all be *one, just as you, Father, are in me, and I in you, that they also may be in us, so that the world may believe that you have sent me*. The glory that you have given me I have given to them, that they may be *one* even as we are *one*, I in them and you in me, that they may become *perfectly one, so that the world may know that you sent me and loved them even as you loved me*.⁷⁹

The oneness between the Father and the Son is the model for the oneness of Christians. The purpose of this oneness is “so that the world may believe that you have sent me.” That is, the very proclamation of the gospel results from the oneness of the Church.

This oneness is to be modeled after the Son’s oneness with the Father. Jesus agreed at every point with the Father. In the Garden of Gethsemane, he didn’t agree to disagree with the Father. He didn’t bargain with the Father to come up with a baseline minimum about a few key things they should agree on – while disagreeing with the rest of it (filling with water the ship of a notion that we can commune together so long as we agree that Jesus is our Savior and that his body and blood are truly present). Rather, he fell perfectly in line with the cup His Father gave him to drink. That is what it means for the Church to be one: full-spirited agreement to the Church’s confession, not setting up an arbitrary “let’s agree this much” minimum.

This leads to the question: “How can any LCMS pastor then believe that all of his congregants (let alone the entirety of Synod) have the same confession of faith?” While this seems like a “gotcha” question that undermines the entire argument – the answer is simple. To

⁷⁸ Ephesians 4:4-6, 11-16

⁷⁹ John 17:11, 20-23 (emphasis added)

be a member of the LC-MS (or a body in Altar/Pulpit fellowship with it) one must publically confess the faith and profess adherence to LC-MS teaching. Thus, one has agreed to let themselves be guided and admonished by LC-MS teaching. That same pledge is not made by a visiting member of another denomination who publically confesses the teaching of that other denomination.

We take all of this so seriously because of the content found in James' letter to the Church we find: "Not many of you should become teachers, my brothers, for you know that we who teach will be judged with greater strictness."⁸⁰ Our pastors take this warning to heart, so it is for this and all of the above reasons that congregations of the Lutheran Church – Missouri Synod protect those who are unrepentant from harm, guard the rail from those who are irreverent, and offer the gracious gifts of Christ's body and blood to those seeking forgiveness. In addition to pastoral oversight our congregations are encouraged to adopt the following statement:

The Lord's Supper is celebrated at this congregation in the confession and glad confidence that, as he says, our Lord gives into our mouths not only bread and wine but his very body and blood to eat and drink for the forgiveness of sins and to strengthen our union with him and with one another. Our Lord invites to his table those who trust his words, repent of all sin, and set aside any refusal to forgive and love as he forgives and loves us, that they may show forth his death until he comes.

Because those who eat and drink our Lord's body and blood unworthily do so to their great harm, and because Holy Communion is a confession of faith which is confessed at this altar, any who are not yet instructed, in doubt, or who hold a confession differing from that of this congregation and the Lutheran Church – Missouri Synod, and yet desire to receive the sacrament, are asked first to speak with the pastor.

For further study, see Matt. 5:23f.; 10:32f.; 18:15-35; 26:26-29; 1 Cor. 11:17-34.⁸¹

When our practice of Communion is understood in this perspective, the traditional time-honored practice of Close Communion is seen to be simply a way of manifesting faithfulness to God's Word and loving concern for our fellow sinners.⁸²

The Service of the Sacrament in Worship:

The Lord's Supper is celebrated regularly in the Christian Church. For us, it takes place in the Divine Service as the Service of the Sacrament. In this Sacrament, those participating receive the very body and blood of Christ in, with, and under the bread and wine. They receive it to strengthen faith and are given forgiveness, life, and salvation by God. By now we have

⁸⁰ James 3:1

⁸¹ Commission on Theology and Church Relations *Model Communion-Card Statement*

⁸² Nafzger

demonstrated how important this meal is to the life of the Church and because of its importance it is given a fully fleshed-out liturgy⁸³ to help this jewel shine.

Preface:

The Lord be with you.

And also with you.

Lift up your hearts.

We lift them to the Lord.

Let us give thanks to the Lord our God.

It is right to give Him thanks and praise.

It is truly good, right, and salutary... evermore praising You and saying:⁸⁴

The Service of the Sacrament begins with the “Proper Preface.” This is one of the most ancient portions of our liturgy. It is a dialogue between the pastor and the people (i.e. that is the wholeness of the Church present in the local congregation). We ask that the Lord is present in the lives of all who are in attendance and it shows a mutual caring and a mutual sharing. It invites participation and attention.⁸⁵ It is followed up by a prayerful thanksgiving to God that is aligned specifically to the season of the Church. It helps us to focus ourselves on one aspect of God’s grace in dealing with his creation. At the close of the Preface, the pastor says, “Therefore with angels and archangels and with all the company of heaven...” This shows that we are not alone in our worship. Our worship is truly corporate in nature and we are grafted into the perpetual worship of the angelic choirs and the invisible church⁸⁶ of all ages.⁸⁷

Sanctus:

Holy, holy, holy Lord God of pow’r and might: Heaven and earth are full of Your glory. Hosanna. Hosanna. Hosanna in the highest. Blessed is He who comes in the name of the Lord. Hosanna in the highest.⁸⁸

The “Sanctus” comes from the heavenly vision that that prophet Isaiah provides to the Church.⁸⁹ By singing this hymn, the congregation becomes a part of the heavenly chorus.⁹⁰ The second half of the hymn comes from Matthew’s account of Jesus’ triumphal entry into

⁸³ Liturgy simply means “the order of service or worship”

⁸⁴ The Commission on Worship of the Lutheran Church – Missouri Synod *Lutheran Service Book* Concordia Publishing House. St. Louis, MO 2006 pg. 160, 161 (Henceforth: *LSB*)

⁸⁵ Maschke, Timothy H. *Gathered Guests* Concordia Publishing House. St. Louis, MO 2003 pg. 141, 142

⁸⁶ Hebrews 12:1 “We are surrounded by... a great cloud of witnesses.” ESV

⁸⁷ Maschke, pg. 143

⁸⁸ *LSB*, pg. 161

⁸⁹ Isaiah 6:3 “Holy, holy, holy is the LORD of hosts; the whole earth is full of his glory!” ESV

⁹⁰ Kinnaman, Scot A. *Worshiping with Angels and Archangels: An Introduction to the Divine Service* Concordia Publishing House. St. Louis, MO 2006 pg. 31

Jerusalem.⁹¹ In the same way of Jesus' first followers we also acknowledge the coming of Jesus into this sacramental meal and worship him as the one who saves us. All of this cues the congregation to see that God is showing up in order to give us his gifts.

Prayer of Thanksgiving:

Blessed are You, Lord of heaven and earth, for You have had mercy on those whom You created and sent Your only-begotten Son into our flesh to bear our sin and be our Savior. With repentant joy we receive the salvation accomplished for us by the all-availing sacrifice of His body and His blood on the cross.

Gathered in the name and the remembrance of Jesus, we beg You, O Lord, to forgive, renew, and strengthen us with Your Word and Spirit. Grant us faithfully to eat His body and drink His blood as He bids us do in His own testament. Gather us together, we pray, from the ends of the earth to celebrate with all the faithful the marriage feast of the Lamb in His kingdom, which has no end. Graciously receive our prayers; deliver and preserve us. To You alone, O Father, be all glory, honor, and worship, with the Son and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever.

Amen.⁹²

The Prayer of Thanksgiving is broken up into two parts. In the first part the congregation praises God for the gift of Jesus as the incarnate Son whose death on the cross is the once-for-all sacrifice for the forgiveness of sins.⁹³ It contains words drawn from John 3:16 and draws the congregation's hearts and minds to the grace that God has given to creation in His Son.⁹⁴ The opening of this prayer clearly emphasizes that what is about to occur is solely an act of God. In the second part of the prayer, we ask God to deliver what He has promised and that the Spirit would strengthen the faith and prepare the hearts of all those who will receive Holy Communion.⁹⁵ By preparing our hearts, we simply mean what Luther wrote, "A person who has faith in these words, 'given for you' and 'shed for you for the forgiveness of sins,' is really worthy and well prepared."⁹⁶ Our conversion and the gift of faith is the work of the Holy Spirit alone. So we turn our hearts and minds to the promise of Jesus and ask that the Holy Spirit continue working this trust.

The Lord's Prayer and Words of Institution:

Our Father who art in heaven, hallowed be Thy name, Thy kingdom come, Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven; give us this day our daily bread; and forgive us our trespasses as we

⁹¹ Matthew 21:9 "And the crowds that went before him and that followed him were shouting, 'Hosanna to the Son of David! Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord! Hosanna in the highest!'" ESV

⁹² LSB, pg. 161

⁹³ Kinnaman, pg. 32

⁹⁴ Maschke, pg. 144

⁹⁵ Kinnaman, pg. 32

⁹⁶ Small Catechism: Sacrament of the Altar ¶9-10

forgive those who trespass against us; and lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil. For Thine is the kingdom and the power and the glory forever and ever. Amen.

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."⁹⁷

Here the congregation and pastor speak the words of our Lord. When the Lord's Prayer is included in the Service of the Sacrament the Church calls upon our Father to deliver His gifts and answer our petitions through the Sacrament. The Words of Institution are used by the pastor to consecrate (or set apart) the bread and wine for God's special use.⁹⁸ This also gives the congregation opportunity to hear both what they are about to receive and why they are receiving it.

The terms "bread" and "wine"⁹⁹ have been static for millennia. As such, when one uses bread for Communion it should simply be made of grain. When one uses wine, it should be as Christ has said – the "fruit of the vine," meaning grapes, and in a culture without refrigeration and preservatives the only result is wine (juice only found within minutes of picking the grapes).¹⁰⁰ Therefore, it should only be grape wine (regardless of color) used to institute and distribute in the Sacrament.

The Pax Domini and Agnus Dei:

The peace of the Lord be with you always.

Amen.

Lamb of God, You take away the sin of the world; have mercy on us. Lamb of God, You take away the sin of the world; have mercy on us. Lamb of God, You take away the sin of the world; grant us peace.¹⁰¹

In his book *Worshiping with Angels and Archangels*, Scot Kinnaman excellently writes:

"The pastor holds the body and blood of Jesus before the congregation and speaks the Pax Domini as Christ Himself did on the first Easter when He stood in the midst of His disciples. The Pax is the voice of the Gospel announcing the remission of sins through its called minister, the

⁹⁷ *LSB*, pg. 162

⁹⁸ Maschke, pg. 145

⁹⁹ One can note by searching lexicons that the English word "wine" can be traced as a cognate from Hebrew to Greek to Latin to English – it has literalistically been the same word for over 4000 years.

¹⁰⁰ Kolb, Robert *The Christian Faith* Concordia Publishing House. St. Louis, MO 1993. pg. 230

¹⁰¹ *LSB*, pg. 163

pastor. Being at peace with God, those who have been instructed in the faith are called to dine on the Lord's life-giving Supper.¹⁰²

This pronouncement of peace is immediately followed by the congregation responding with the *Agnus Dei*. These words echo the words of John the Baptist (John 1:29). The context of the situation could not be more perfect. Just as John the Baptist saw the physical Jesus who would be sacrificed for the sins of the world, we too see the physical Jesus who had been sacrificed for our sins. It is Jesus alone who was the sacrifice. It is Jesus alone who is the One who gives access to God the Father's mercy and peace.

Distribution:

Take, eat; this is the very body of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, given into death for the forgiveness of all your sins. Take, drink; this is the very blood of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, shed for you for the forgiveness of all your sins.

Now this eating and drinking of the very body and blood of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ strengthen and preserve you in the one true faith to life everlasting. Go in peace dear brothers and sisters, your sins are forgiven. Amen.

In this meal the Christian receives exactly what Jesus says they receive: the forgiveness of sins, life, and salvation. Proper practice dictates that the pastor first gives the body and then the blood. Once the participant is able to receive both, the pastor then gives the reassuring blessing that Jesus indeed forgives them. The practice in which Communion is delivered is open to local custom. Some congregations choose to use "continuous communion" where members of the congregation continuously move in a single-file line from the first to second element. Following everyone's reception the pastor then blesses the whole community. Other congregations choose to have "tables" of participants – where an appropriately sized group gathers around the altar together, receives the body, receives the blood, and then receives the dismissal blessing. The number of "tables" is contingent upon how many worshippers are present. The final style is rarer, in it the entire community in attendance gathers together at the same time (whether around the altar or around the sanctuary) and receives first the body, then the blood, and finally the blessing. These all have their positives and negatives, the importance is not based on how Communion is delivered but in the fact that it is received by the congregation.

Post-Communion Canticle and Collect:

Lord, now lettest Thou Thy servant depart in peace according to Thy word, for mine eyes have seen Thy salvation, which Thou hast prepared before the face of all people, a light to lighten the Gentiles and the glory of Thy people Israel. Glory be to the Father and to the Son and to

¹⁰² Kinnaman, pg. 36

**the Holy Ghost; as it was in the beginning, is now, and ever shall be, world without end.
Amen.**

Let us pray.

We give thanks to You, almighty God, that You have refreshed us through this salutary gift, and we implore You that of Your mercy You would strengthen us through the same in faith toward You and in fervent love toward one another; through Jesus Christ, Your Son, our Lord, who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever.

Amen.¹⁰³

The song is the *Song of Simeon* found in the second chapter of Luke’s gospel account. Simeon is a faithful Israelite who was permitted by God the Father to see the Christ and Savior of Israel before his death. Kinnaman writes: “Having seen Christ in the Sacrament – receiving Him in our mouths and so into our souls – we join Simeon in his inspired song.”¹⁰⁴ His praise and adoration for the gift of the Savior thus becomes ours as we thank God for the salvation that has been won for us by the sacrifice of Jesus. The collect that concludes the Service of the Sacrament is one that concisely gathers our thoughts of thanksgiving and presents them before God the Father the Son and the Holy Spirit. We, with Christians throughout time and space, ask God to strengthen our faith and love for Him and our love for our neighbor.

The order of the Service of the Sacrament in Lutheran congregations focuses on what God the Father is doing for us through His Son Jesus in the mystery of the Holy Spirit. The role of the participants becomes one of purely receiving God’s gracious gifts and responding in thanksgiving for all of the work that God is doing for them.

The Lord’s Supper is a miracle that the Triune God works for Christians. Of the three Sacraments, the Lord’s Supper is the most mysterious because not only is the believer receiving a gift from God but they are also receiving the true body and blood of the Savior Jesus. They receive these gifts in, with, and under the bread and wine. They receive these gifts for the forgiveness of sins, and the believer can trust that where forgiveness is found – there is also salvation and life. This sacramental meal is a foretaste of the feast and fellowship to come.

¹⁰³ *LSB*, pgs. 199-201

¹⁰⁴ Kinnaman, pg. 40