Wednesday of Judica , A ✠ D 2011

1 Corinthians 11:23-31; Luke 24:13-35, 44-47

In the Name of the Father and of the ✠ Son and of the Holy Spirit.

1 Everyone who communes receives the true Body and Blood of Jesus. But not everyone receives them for forgiveness. St. Paul's warning is clear: "Whoever, therefore, eats the bread or drinks the cup of the Lord in an unworthy manner will be guilty of profaning 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." Everyone receives the Body and Blood of Jesus, but whether that true Body and Blood of Jesus delivers forgiveness or judgment depends on the worthiness of the recipient.

2 Who receives this Sacrament worthily? "Fasting and bodily preparation are certainly fine outward training. But that person is truly worthy and well prepared who has faith in these words: 'Given and shed for you for the forgiveness of sins.' But anyone who does not believe these words or doubts them is unworthy and unprepared, for the words 'for you' require all hearts to believe." What makes one worthy? Faith. Not knowledge that Jesus is God, not acceptance that the Lord's Supper gives the true Body and Blood of Jesus, not membership in a congregation, but faith is required. Such faith is a filial trust in Jesus for forgiveness. Such faith encompasses repentance, complete lack of trust in one's self and a desire to be free from sin. Such faith comes only as a gift. Worthiness, therefore, is not something you make yourself.

3 Worthiness for the Lord's Supper comes from knowing your unworthiness. "The Sacrament does not depend upon our worthiness. We are not baptized because we are worthy and holy. Nor do we go to Confession because we are pure and without sin. On the contrary, we go because we are poor, miserable people. We go exactly because we are unworthy. This is true unless we are talking about someone who desires no grace and Absolution nor intends to change. (LC 438:61)"

4 Worthiness does not come from cleaning up and getting ready. The Lord's Supper is not for those who are free from sin, but for those who desire to be free from sin. "How can you withhold the Lord's Supper from someone, pastor?" people wonder. To those who will not acknowledge their sins or who do not desire to be free from them, the Lord's Supper is of no benefit. It is spiritually harmful, bestowing judgment, not forgiveness. And to continue in sin, rebelling against the Word, is to fight against faith. Such willful, impenitent sin will eventually destroy the gift of faith. To withhold the Lord's Supper is both a warning against such self-destructive actions and also a refusal to give the impenitent sinner something that will harm him. These are always hard words both to say and to hear, but they are the words of Christ, who desires not the death of any sinner, who desires all men be saved, who wants His gift of faith to be received by all.

5 How should you prepare for the Lord's Supper? Fasting and bodily preparation are good disciplines. Fasting from sundown Saturday until the Lord's Supper on a Sunday morning is a good practice, one that the Catechism here encourages as "fine, outward training," inasmuch as hunger for food sharpens your hunger for the Bread of Life, but this preparation is not a substitute for faith.

What to do if you feel no need? What should you do if you are not aware of this need and have no hunger and thirst for the Sacrament? Luther's advice is this: "To such a person no better advice can be given than this: first eh should touch his body to see if he still has flesh and blood. Then he should believe what the scriptures say of it in Galatians 5 and Romans 7 (that is, that the flesh fights against the good gifts of God and pours forth only sin). Second, he should look around to see whether he is still in the world, and remember that there will be no lack of sin and trouble, as the Scriptures say in John 15-16 and in 1 John 2 and 5. Third, he will certainly have the devil also around him, who with his lying and murdering day and night will let him have no peace, within or without, as the Scriptures picture him in John 8 and 16; 1 Peter 5; Ephesians 6; and 2 Timothy 2."

6 If you worry that you might not be worthy, if you think the magnitude of your sin has excluded you from the Lord's Supper, if you think that, before you could be worthy of such a gift, you must prepare more, come. You are worthy. That is evidence of repentant faith. Trust in Christ completely and in yourself not at all. If you think you are worthy because you try hard enough, because you're a generally good person, because you do this or that, stay away. In fact, if your reasoning for why you're worthy includes any thoughts about yourself other than the faith Christ delivers to you, you are not worthy. Christ is the only reason anyone is worthy. Faith in Him, the Crucified, is what prepares you. "The words 'for you' require all hearts to believe."

7 What comfort! The gift is free. The faith that makes you worthy is free. The sacrifice is complete. Nothing is required of you. Come as a beggar, praying "Christ, have mercy," trusting that it is simply the Lord's favorite thing to be doing, having mercy on sinners. In the Sacrament is forgiveness greater than all your sins, mercy more potent than all your unworthiness, a Body more durable than your own, a food that endures to eternity.

In the Name of the Father and of the ✠ Son and of the Holy Spirit.

Pastor Jeff Hemmer