

**Wednesday of Laetare , A ✕ D 2011**

**1 Corinthians 10:15-21; Mark 14:22–25**

*In the Name of the Father and of the ✕ Son and of the Holy Spirit.*

1 Eating and drinking is about as basic as breathing. It requires no effort. Your body naturally wants to do it. And yet, last week, you confessed that, in the eating and drinking of Holy Communion, you receive these benefits: forgiveness of sins, life, and salvation. How can that be? How can bodily eating and drinking do such great things? How can something so fleshly, so corporeal, so carnal, do something so great as deliver the forgiveness of sins, secure for your own body the resurrection from the dead, and procure for you the salvation you so desperately need? Shouldn't God work in more spiritual ways? Shouldn't He deliver forgiveness, life, and salvation directly to your heart? Why must He go through means like bread and wine and deliver them into your mouth?

2 That's how it is with the Lord. He works incarnationally. The Word became flesh, became incarnate, eternally enfleshed for you. So He continues to work in fleshly, incarnational ways. He could rescue from sin, death, and the devil any way He might choose, but the way He has promised to do this is through water and the spoken Word in Holy Baptism. He could have chosen to give you faith immediately, without means, having you go off into a wilderness to pray and fast for three weeks in order to receive enlightenment. But He chose instead to give you faith through preaching, through sound waves, through your ear. Faith comes by hearing. He could choose to forgive your sins by giving you a warm, fuzzy, forgiven feeling in your belly, but instead He has promised to forgive your sins through the words of Holy Absolution and through the mouths of men, pastors. And He could have chosen to give you eternal life, sending His Holy Spirit to you in a dream or a vision, by warming your heart strangely, or through the gentle breeze blowing through the spring tree blossoms, but instead He chose to give you eternal life by feeding you with the Body and Blood of Jesus. It's all very fleshly, but that makes sense if the Word became flesh.

3 And yet, eating and drinking are not all there is to the Sacrament. "Certainly not just eating and drinking do these things, but the words written here: 'Given and shed for you for the forgiveness of sins.' These words, along with the bodily eating and drinking, are the main thing in the Sacrament. Whoever believes these words has exactly what they say: 'forgiveness of sins.'" Eating and drinking, based on the promise of Christ's words, along with faith which believes and trusts these words of Jesus.

4 Everything rests on Christ. Nothing depends on you. This is good news. Christ has promised that He gives His real Body and Blood in the Sacrament. Nothing you do can change His promise. He has promised that His Body and Blood give what He won on the cross: full forgiveness of sins. Nothing you can do can earn this precious treasure. All you need is faith, which trusts these words and promises of Christ, which believes that what He gives you is not

mere bread and wine, not merely symbols thereof, but exactly what He says: His real Body and real Blood. Yes, it's all very fleshly. But then, the Word became flesh.

5 This is why every church body that believes in the Real Presence also practices closed communion. If this is really the Body of Jesus, then there can be no messing around, no coming without faith, no coming without also being united in confession with those with whom you commune. Those who commune together confess together, believe the same thing together. Contrary to appearances, closed communion is not a loveless practice. It is eminently loving to say to someone, "What you believe is important to us, important enough not to fudge the details. We want you to be united with us in faith, but you're free not to be." It is eminently loving to say to someone, "What you say about Jesus matters. We want you to believe and confess the truth about Him." It is eminently loving to say to someone, "Jesus wants you to receive His Body and Blood for your benefit; without faith, you would receive them to your harm."

6 Faith is necessary, but faith is a free gift, not a work on your part. Faith which believes is faith which can say "Amen." There is a good and pious practice of saying "amen" out loud during the distribution when the pastor says to you "The Body of Christ." To say "amen" is to say, "Yes, I believe this is truly the Body of Christ as He promised." So also, to say "amen" after "The Blood of Christ" is to say, "Yes, I believe Jesus' words that this is truly His blood shed for me for the forgiveness of sins." Everything rests on Jesus: His promise, His gift of faith, His Body and Blood.

7 Do you want forgiveness? Do you need forgiveness? If you want the forgiveness of sins, do not go to Calvary. Forgiveness was won at Calvary, but it is not delivered there. If you want forgiveness for sins, go to the altar. Forgiveness is not won at the altar, but is delivered there. "Those who are mindful of their weakness desire to be rid of it and long for help. They should regard and use the Sacrament just like a precious antidote against the poison that they have in them. Here in the Sacrament you are to receive from the lips of Christ forgiveness of sin. It contains and brings with it God's grace and His Spirit with all His gifts, protection, shelter, and power against death and the devil and all misfortune. (LC 439:70)"

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Pastor Jeff Hemmer