

Maundy Thursday

1 Corinthians 11:23-32: "The Lamb's Body and Blood"

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Behold, the Lamb!

In Nomine Iesu

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1 Corinthians 11:23-32

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. / 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)

O Lord Jesus Christ, we thank You, that of Your infinite mercy You have instituted this Your Sacrament, in which we eat Your body and drink Your blood: Grant us, we beseech You, by Your Holy Spirit, that we may not receive this gift unworthily, but that we may confess our sins, remember Your agony and death, believe the forgiveness of sin, and day by day grow in faith and love, until we obtain eternal salvation; through You, who live and reign with the Father and the Holy Spirit, one true God, now and forever. Amen. *(ELH, p. 154)*

In Christ Jesus, who freely gives Himself to us as food and drink, dear fellow redeemed:

We know the account of the institution of the Lord's Supper very well. In fact we review its details every time we partake of the Sacrament: "*Our Lord Jesus Christ, the same night in which He was betrayed, took bread*" and so on. But it is easy to forget about the context of this Supper. Jesus instituted this Holy Meal while He and His disciples enjoyed another holy meal: the Passover. It was no accident that these two meals should be joined together.

The Passover meal was a reminder of the LORD's deliverance of His people from slavery in Egypt. At that first Passover, each household slaughtered a blemish-free male lamb, consumed its flesh roasted over the fire, and painted its blood on the doorposts of the house. When the Angel of the LORD saw the blood of the lamb, He passed over that house, and everyone inside was saved from death.

God told His people to celebrate this Passover deliverance annually, so they would remember what He had done for them. This is why Jesus now reclined with His disciples in the upper room enjoying the Passover meal of lamb, unleavened bread, and wine. It was a meal for looking back, for thanking the LORD for His mercy upon His people. The disciples could not

have guessed that Jesus was about to institute something new out of the Passover meal, something for the present and for the future.

He took some unleavened bread, gave thanks, broke it, and gave it to the disciples saying, *“Take, eat; this is My body, which is given for you.”* How unexpected! How strange! Jesus told them to eat His body, and He said it is given in the bread! Then Jesus took the cup of wine, gave thanks, and 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 and for many for the remission of sins.”* His blood in the cup! How can this be? As hard as it was to understand, Jesus’ words were clear. He was instituting a special Supper in which His body was the food and His blood was the drink.

But there are many who do not believe these words of Jesus. They do not believe He gives His own body and blood in the Supper for us to consume. And until they are led by the Holy Spirit to believe His Word, this Supper is not for them. St. Paul writes by inspiration that whoever *“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.... For anyone who eats and drinks without discerning the body eats and drinks judgment on himself.”*

This would be something like an Israelite at the first Passover saying that he is glad to eat the roasted lamb, but he isn’t about to paint his doorposts with blood. Death would have come to that house because the person did not believe God’s Word. In the same way, Paul writes that those who deny what Jesus says He gives in His Supper sin against Him, and they eat and drink judgment on themselves.

So how can we be certain that we will receive His Supper properly? First of all, we take Jesus at His Word. This is a matter of faith. We can’t see any change take place when the Words of Jesus are spoken over the bread and wine. There is no scientific proof that His body and blood are present. But Jesus says they are, and He does not lie.

Second, we eat and drink His body and blood *“in remembrance of”* Him. This means to remember all that Jesus did to save us, how He perfectly kept the Law for us, how He died in payment of all our sins, and how He rose again on the third day. We don’t go to the Lord’s Supper thinking of all the good things we have done for God or for others. We go with humble hearts, trusting in Jesus alone as our Savior.

This brings us to the third part of our preparation to receive the Supper. Paul writes that a person must *“examine himself”* before this eating and drinking. The Lord’s Supper is no ordinary meal. Jesus is present, and He knows our hearts. We come repenting of the sins He already knows about, and we ask Him to strengthen us and help us to change our sinful ways and do better. When we prepare for the Lord’s Supper in this way—trusting what Jesus says, remembering what He did to save us, and repenting of our sins—we can be sure we will receive His body and blood with blessing.

The Passover was a meal for looking back, and there was no spiritual benefit gained from eating the lamb and unleavened bread and drinking the wine. But now in the Lord’s Supper, we eat Jesus’ body with the bread and drink His blood with the wine *“for the remission of sins.”* The first

Passover saved the Israelites from slavery to the Egyptians and from temporal death. The Lord's Supper saves us from even more – our slavery to sin and eternal death.

Jesus instituted the new Supper of His body and blood at the Passover meal to show that He is the fulfillment of the Passover. The Passover lamb pointed to Him. His holy body given in His Supper is nourishment and strength for our journey, and His holy blood cleanses us from all our sins (1Jo. 1:7). Jesus is the Lamb of God, who gladly gives His body and blood for our eternal good. *Thanks be to God! Amen.*

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