

Maundy Thursday

1 Corinthians 11:23-32: "The Lord Calls Us Fools to Believe His Saving Word."

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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, whose message of grace and forgiveness is "*foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God*" (1Co. 1:18), dear fellow redeemed:

Today is April Fools' Day, a day of practical jokes, pranks, and hoaxes. It might not seem the right day to celebrate the events of Maundy Thursday. But in fact there are many who find the things that Jesus taught and did on this day to be very foolish. The same people would say it is foolish for you to take time out of your weekday to come to church and remember these things. We can see why people have questions about Maundy Thursday.

Even Jesus' own disciples weren't sure about His actions on that day. While they were all reclining at the table to observe the Passover celebration, Jesus got up, set aside His outer garments, tied a towel around His waist, and proceeded to wash and dry the disciples' feet (Joh. 13:4-5). What He was doing was servants' work, work considered far below His station. Peter protested, saying that it was foolishness for a Teacher to wash the feet of His disciples. "*You shall never wash my feet!*" He cried (v. 8).

Many have a similar view of the Lord's Supper. The idea that the incarnate God comes to serve sinners by giving them His own body and blood in the bread and wine is utter foolishness to them. Why would God decide to bring forgiveness in this way? It just doesn't stand to reason!

We understand the skepticism some have about the Lord's Supper, because we struggle with it too.

How could it be that Jesus keeps giving us His own flesh and blood? If that were true, wouldn't His body get smaller and smaller until nothing was left? And how can we be certain that His body and blood are actually present? We could run any scientific test on the consecrated bread and wine, and we would find no skin or blood cells. Even many Christians agree that it is foolish to imagine that we actually take Jesus' body and blood in our mouths along with the bread and wine.

However foolish it may seem, Jesus says it is true. "*This is My body,*" He declares. "*This cup is the New Testament in My blood.*" St. Paul explained it the same way to the Christian congregation in Corinth. He said that all who eat and drink at the Lord's Supper in an unworthy manner are guilty "*concerning the body and blood of the Lord.*" They are not guilty of mishandling mere bread and wine. They are guilty of sinning against Jesus Himself, since they do not recognize what is being distributed and received.

To commune in a worthy manner means believing that Jesus speaks the truth when He calls the bread His body and the wine His blood. What He serves at the altar here is His same holy body that hung on the cross for your sins and the same precious blood that ran from His wounds. "This is given and shed for you," He says, "*for the remission of sins*" (Mat. 26:28).

Since Jesus is making this Sacrament available "*for the remission of sins,*" it is clear it is intended only for those who know and admit that they are sinful. St. Paul writes, "*Let a person examine himself, then.*" We might be able to fool others by keeping our sins covered up. But we can't fool God. He sees everything in our heart. He knows how we have broken His Commandments down to the smallest detail.

There are many who think they are prepared to come to the Lord's Supper, but actually they are not. They might acknowledge that they have some sin, but it does not bother them in any major way. They figure they are no worse than the other people taking Communion, so why shouldn't they take it too? This is not repentance. Measuring the extent of your sin by how you compare with others is not the standard God has set.

God's holy Law demands perfection. We are supposed to perfectly love Him, perfectly honor His name, perfectly hear and learn His Word, and perfectly love the people around us. Because we have not done this, God the Father sent His only Son to be punished in our place. Our countless sins put Jesus on the cross.

Your sin was very clear to Him as He suffered hell in your place on the cross. But is your sin clear to you? Is there any area of your life where you have not been living the way God commands you to live? Have you told yourself that it is no big deal, because everyone else does it too? Have you found yourself going through the motions at church and at the Lord's Table and not considering it all that important?

It is foolish to take sin lightly as well as the Lord's own antidote for sin in His Holy Supper. We have all been this kind of foolish, but our merciful Lord has not written us off. He calls us to

come again to His Table. He calls us to bring our imperfect life, our guilty conscience, and our weak faith to the altar in repentance. And He promises to fill us with His forgiveness, His comfort, His strength.

You are one of those sinners for whom Jesus instituted His Supper. All sinners are fools in their own way. But the Lord's Supper is only for those who know they are fools, and who confess their sinful foolishness. It is not for those who reject Jesus' Word about what He gives in His Supper. It is not for those who believe they are righteous on their own.

Remember that this is not our Supper that we are free to offer to whomever and in whatever circumstances we please. This is the Lord's Supper. He decides who is welcome at His Table and what the conditions are for participation. He wants all to partake of this glorious Meal, but He wants none to receive it to their harm. This is why we make sure our guests know what the Lord's Supper is all about before they join us at the Communion rail.

The unbelieving world says this is all foolishness. But the world has no solution for sin and no hope for a life after this one. By the grace of God, we believe that Jesus has paid for our sins, and that He brings us His forgiveness and life every time we eat and drink His body and blood. If this trust in His saving Word makes us foolish in the world's eyes, then we will gladly take "*the foolishness of God*" over the empty thoughts of men (1Co. 1:25).

In the "foolishness" of Maundy Thursday, Jesus instituted the precious Supper of His body and blood "*for you.*" It is for your forgiveness, your salvation, and your life. *Thanks be to God! Amen.*

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