

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.
Greetings in the name of our risen Lord Jesus.

Today (Tonight) we will develop our study this Passion season by considering how the our Lord's death on the cross relates to the sixth chief part to Luther's Small Catechism: The Sacrament of the Altar.

We consider our text,

1 Corinthians 10:16–17 (NKJV) — 16 The cup of blessing which we bless, is it not the communion of the blood of Christ? The bread which we break, is it not the communion of the body of Christ? **17** For we, though many, are one bread and one body; for we all partake of that one bread.

THE CROSS AND THE SACRAMENT OF THE ALTAR: A UNION.

In Jesus Name who has loved us and given Himself for us,
dear fellow redeemed,

The name of our nation indicates a common bond – The United States of America. What is it that unites us? We read from our own constitution: “We the People of the United States, in Order to form a more perfect Union, establish Justice, insure domestic Tranquility, etc. ... do ordain and establish this Constitution for the United States of America.” The words forged in this document are what bind us together in these 50 states.

What is bound together in the Lord's Supper and what creates such a union? Here is where the cross is intimately tied, yes, essential to the understanding of Luther's catechism. What happened on the night of our Lord's betrayal is what brings to us the meaning and miracle of the Lord's Supper.

We sometimes call this sacrament Holy Communion. We find the same word in our text, v.16. This word most basically means a “sharing.” It is the same word we sometimes find translated “fellowship.” We consider tonight (today) this fellowship, this sharing, this union of the Lord's Supper.

May the Spirit bless us as we consider the THE CROSS AND THE SACRAMENT OF THE ALTAR – A UNION . . . a union with the body and blood of our Lord, . . . a union with the forgiveness of sins, . . . a union with each other.

1. ... a union with body and blood of our Lord

We call the Lord's Supper a “Sacrament.” This word is not actually found in the Bible. However we use this word to teach some important truths. We call it a sacrament

because we look upon it as something sacred, something set apart. We look at it as something which our Lord instituted to bring miracles through earthly elements, bread and wine. We look at it as something more than symbolic, for in and through these substances we receive heavenly blessings. The Sacrament of the Altar is a union with the body and blood of our Lord.

The words of institution prove this fact. It is recorded in all four Gospel accounts. Every service in which you celebrate this supper, the pastor repeats these important words – ... “He took bread... broke it and gave it to His disciples, saying, ‘Take, eat, this is My body which is given for you’ ... He took the cup after supper, saying, ‘This is My blood of the New Covenant which is shed for you for the forgiveness of sins.’

In these words alone we agree with Luther who said, “Dismiss reason and understanding, which in vain are ... unable to understand it, refuse to believe it” (*What Luther Says*, #287, 1959). We poke out the eyes of reason so that we can see – in this bread and wine is found the body and blood of our Lord.

This is the same body which was given and blood which was shed on the cross. Any attempt twist these words of our Lord rob this sacrament of the blessings it offers. The words stand as our Lord delivered them – “this is.”

And our text agrees. **v.16 – “The cup . . . Is it not the communion (the sharing, the union) of the blood of Christ . . . The bread . . . is it not the communion (the sharing, the union) of the body of Christ?”**

And so, in his Small Catechism, Luther begins his discussion on the Sacrament with...

I. What is the Sacrament of the Altar?

It is the true body and blood of our Lord Jesus Christ, given to us Christians under the bread and wine to eat and to drink, as it was instituted by Christ Himself.

Hence we refer to this union as “The REAL Presence.” We are really united with the sacrifice of our Savior which paid for our sins. The same body which has perfectly taken our place before the Father, which has endured our stripes, which has borne our wretchedness is REALLY present – that same blood which dripped down the brow of our Savior as He was crowned a sinner for our wrongdoings is REALLY present. Not that we are chewing on His body in a physical way, but that we are receiving His body in a REAL way. Not that we are drinking His blood in a digestive union, but that we are receiving His blood in a SACRAMENTAL union.

2. ... with the forgiveness of sins

The founding Fathers based the Union of these States in which we live based on words. Essentially, there is nothing more than words that join us together as Americans.

In a sense, we find a parallel thing happening in the Sacrament of the Altar. What is it that ultimately unites us with the cross when we take part in this Sacrament? Is it us who have rightly prepared ourselves, who have committed ourselves to Christ, who have lived such noble and worthy lives? Is it the pastor who performs some magical incantation, does a pastor have some special power that changes the bread and wine?

We do anything but contribute to this union. If it were up to us we would only take away. We are more inclined to disband. So often we come to the Lord's Supper distracted. And are there not times when we go away from this blessing right back into the sinful behavior we are often accustomed to? Yet our Lord said "do this in remembrance of me..." Thank God that the blessings here given do not rely on us. The Lord's Supper is all about His doing, His giving, and our mere receiving.

In the Small Catechism we believe, teach, and confess,

3. How can eating and drinking do such wonderful things?

Eating and drinking actually do nothing. It is the words, "Given and shed for you for the forgiveness of sins" which do this. These words, together with the bodily eating and drinking, are the main part of the Sacrament. Whoever believes these words has exactly what they say: forgiveness of sins.

Our Lord's promise is so much more sure than the constitution of the United States. To this day people continue reinterpret what the words of the constitution says. To this day Congress and the States can add and subtract amendments to this document. Jesus says, "heaven and earth will pass away, but My words will by no means pass away." During the civil war 11 states left the union. Nothing, no earthly amendment of man, no twisted attacks against Scripture, not even your own sins can change our Lord's words: "shed for you for the forgiveness of your sins" – your sins are forgiven.

2. What is the benefit of this eating and drinking?

The words, "Given and shed for you for the forgiveness of sins," show us that God gives forgiveness of sins, life, and salvation through the Sacrament. For where there is forgiveness of sins, there is also life and salvation.

This wine is indeed called "The blood of the New Covenant shed for the forgiveness of sins." Here in the reception of Christ's body and blood is confirmed that blessed New Covenant of grace. Herein you are united with the forgiveness of sins. This is what God was indicating when He spoke through the prophet Jeremiah, **Jeremiah 31:31–34 (NKJV)** — **31 "Behold, the days are coming, says the Lord, when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah— 32 not according to the covenant that I made with their fathers in the day that I took them by the hand to lead them out of the land of Egypt, My covenant which they broke, though I was a husband to them, says the Lord. 33 But this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days . . . they all shall know Me,**

from the least of them to the greatest of them, says the Lord. For I will forgive their iniquity, and their sin I will remember no more.”

This is the union of the New Covenant – not like the Old Covenant which demanded, which required of us, and which shows us how we have fallen short. Unlike the Old Covenant which promises death, the New Covenant brings life. It is the Passover meal realized. The night of institution, we find our Lord celebrating the last Passover with His disciples. This was the last Passover, since the promised Lamb, the fulfilled sacrifice had finally come. In this supper, Jesus points His disciples to the cross. He unites us with the cross. We can think of this when we call this “the Sacrament of the Altar.” On that Altar of the Cross was lifted up the Last Sacrifice. No more is needed. Once for all sin, He was given. As Paul writes in 1 Corinthians – **1 Corinthians 5:7 (NKJV) – 7 . . . indeed Christ, our Passover, was sacrificed for us.**

In this New Covenant we receive the true Passover Lamb, without blemish, without spot. We are united with the forgiveness of sins.

3. ... with each other.

As we said at the outset, this “communion” is most basically, a “sharing.” This “fellowship” is not just with Christ, it is also with each other. **v.17 – 17 For we, though many, are one bread and one body; for we all partake of that one bread.** The Sacrament of the Altar is a union with each other.

We though many are one. We in the CLC though many churches, many pastors, many personalities, many gifts, many flaws, are One body. The union we enjoy of teaching and confession is rare and only by God’s grace through the gospel. In Acts 2:42 we read of this union in the early Church – **Acts 2:42–45 (NKJV) – 42 And they continued steadfastly in the apostles’ doctrine and fellowship, in the breaking of bread, and in prayers. ... 44 Now all who believed were together, and had all things in common, 45 and sold their possessions and goods, and divided them among all, as anyone had need.**

This is what we are witnessing to in this annual pulpit exchange. We are “having all things in common.” We are sharing pastors. We are sharing faith. I have been a pastor for about eight months now and already I have seen this union at work. I have seen like-minded pastors join in studying God’s Word at study clubs and conferences. I have seen like-minded Christians join in sharing this supper at the Joint Reformation service last October. I have seen prayers and support shared through email and in our individual services. May God preserve this union among us and may we continue to take advantage of it. For we are not just one church down in Illinois, and another church up in Wisconsin – but we are one church.

Even more so, this union is not just with your brothers and sisters in the CLC – **v.17 we, though many, are one body.** Through faith in your Savior, you are united spiritually with fellow believers throughout the ages.

Looking ahead to Maundy Thursday – I hope you can remember this union. Think about your fellow believers in Batavia who are sharing this faith. Think about your fellow believers of years gone by. Think of reformers like Luther as you partake. And think of those disciples who shared bread with our Lord in the flesh on the night He was betrayed. In fact, think of how you are one with the Lord Jesus Himself.

For you are united in this sacrament. You are one with our Lord's body and blood. You are one with the forgiveness of sins. And you are one with each other. The Cross and the Sacrament of the Altar: A Union. In Jesus Name. Amen.