

Sermon for the Sixth Sunday of Easter May 5, 2024 jj

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Holy Communion is no doubt a special meal. It's like a runner picked up the baton from the old Passover supper and then took the race to a whole new level. Moses commanded the children of Israel to remember and commemorate the release from bondage and the exodus from Egypt. A meal, including the preparation of a lamb for the household to eat, brushing the blood on the house's doorpost, and burning the leftovers, was essential to the act of salvation that Passover night. Jesus commanded His disciples, their successors, and us, their future hearers, to remember and proclaim His death which He accomplished on the all-important Day of deliverance, the new Passover, the Good Friday on which all the world was set free from sin and death. The classic meal was shared, and a cup after supper was blessed to create a unique, new meal that remembers and distributes the gifts of salvation. But then the similarities between those two important meals fade, and the Holy Supper of the Lord takes on a new character that Passover had only hinted at. You might have noticed as we read it that Martin Luther used the word pledge several times in his list of questions and answers intended to prepare you for going to the Lord's holy Table. What is this pledge? How does a meal, even a special meal such as this, communicate this pledge? I think it's not too far off-base to connect this pledge that Luther talks about with the triple testimony of Spirit, water and blood that, as John the Elder disciple informs us, together speak in agreement about one thing and that is this: God has given us eternal life, and this life is in His Son. All who have the Son have life. That is the testimony behind the pledge. It's the pledge's content, you might say. What makes the testimony into a pledge from God to me is the critical step that takes my knowledge of what He did in Christ and turns it into an assurance that Jesus died on the cross FOR ME. I can know what it is, I can commemorate through a ritual meal what all

Jesus endured in His mission, I can even affirm that it is true and, beyond my ability to explain it, I can attest with firm conviction He gives His Body and Blood in, with, and under the bread and wine. If I stop there, I haven't yet fulfilled our Lord's com-mandment about this meal. For if I don't trust in the pledge that Jesus did all of this saving work for me, then I have not truly discerned what this Sacrament is really for. I won't understand or at least fully appreciate why my Lord commanded His church to do this often.

And yes, we should do this often, and our fathers in the faith understood that "often" to be every Lord's day, every Sunday. It may have been a while ago since you've gone through the experience, but I suspect the conversations (and yes, arguments, too) surrounding whether a congregation should go to having every Sunday communion actually forced us all to dig down deep by asking ourselves some very basic questions: what really is this Sacrament? What is it for? Why did Jesus institute it? I can get forgiveness in many other ways, so what remains spe-cial about Communion if we observe it so often?

Martin Luther is one of those people I admire, and even envy at times- he always seems to have an answer that's witty and unimpeachably logical, right off the top of his head. Here's Luther's quick comeback: Touch your body! Feel that? If you still have flesh and blood, then in this life you will always have sin and trouble afflicting you. Look around you? Do you see a sin-oppressed world? That's a problem for you that you can't avoid or deny. Though you can't see or feel him, recall the Scriptures that remind you that the devil is constantly on the prowl, ready to attack you with fresh temptation.

And since you always have need, and your Merciful Savior always extends to you His promise, you have reason to go every Sunday to the Sacrament of the Altar, and an ever-present urgency for you not to put it off. This meal is no longer just a memorial of something past. It's not just a warmed-over leftover dish from the Passover. In fact, the Sacrament of the Altar has roots in the entire weekly, yes even daily rituals of sacrifice and purification that were fulfilled and completed in Christ, and it's not just related to the yearly festival of Passover. This new meal, commanded for your benefit by Jesus Himself, is your present, regular participation, a constant partaking in the saving death of Christ who made the one-time payment in full in His Body and Blood for you on the cross.

It's also a little piece of the future in store for you, a foretaste of the feast to come, an assurance of the Church Triumphant given to you while you struggle in the Church Militant. You are running the race well, so receive the sustenance you need to continue on to the finish line and crown of glory that is promised you. Come, often, to this special meal; eat and drink with your risen Lord, for you are His witnesses. You taste His pledge and you have seen that the Lord is good, not just to you, but to all whom He chooses to call to believe in Him and inherit with you the life everlasting.

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