Grace to you and peace from God our Father and our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Amen.

**O Lord, We Praise Thee**

***LSB #617***

Maundy Thursday

04.01.2021

If you notice, this is another Luther hymn. It is the first of the hymns in the section on the Lord’s Supper. The first verse was a Liese sung in the church in the late fourteenth century (late 1300s). A Liese is a “song” that concludes each stanza with the phrase “kyrie eleison,” “Lord, have mercy.”

Luther rewrote the first verse, completely changing the entire second half, but keeping the first intact. He also then wrote and added the 2nd and 3rd verses. His suggestion was that this hymn be sung between the consecration of the host and wine, and it’s distribution as the Body and blood of Christ.

In 1533, Luther used the text of the 1st stanza, having been in existence before his revision of it and the fact that it had been sung in churches for at least a century, that the practice of receiving communion in both kinds had been known AND practiced before his attempts to reform the church. At the time of Luther, the laity were not allowed to receive the cup, only the host. Luther rightly contested that there would be no dispute with the Roman church if it had simply followed in practice what they confessed in this hymn: Thou with thy body and thy blood didst nourish our weak souls that they may flourish.

As we well know from the Scriptures which make up the lection for this Holy Thursday, when Christ instituted the Lord’s Supper, both the Body and Blood were distributed to those gathered in the upper room. And, as we know from Paul’s letter to Corinth, it was the practice to give both body and blood to all the communicants from earliest times.

Our hymn has been wedded to this tune since Luther’s expansion of it, and it has been so popular that it even appeared in Leisentritt’s collection of Catholic hymns in 1567 – amazingly keeping Luther’s revised text and this tune!

It has remained almost unchanged to our day, as it is one of the most popular, if not the greatest Communion hymn. It is often sung during the distribution or as a hymn to close the service. Its prominence as both a confession of the faith, and its catechetical nature are shown by the prominence of its place as the Hymn of the Day for this service on this most holy of Thursdays, Maundy Thursday.

It is good for us to note Luther’s Trinitarian understanding of the Lord’s Supper reflected in this hymn. Note the three verses. Of course, by itself that may be insignificant. But we also see the Trinitarian work in the verses themselves. First, we praise, bless, adore, and bow before God in thanksgiving for the gifts of His Son. Next, we speak of Christ’s body and blood given unto death to win and deliver forgiveness and life. Finally, we confess our need for God’s grace, the work of the Spirit, to live in us a renewed life of faith.

This incredible hymn teaches the richness of God’s work so well. If we are attentive to what we are singing, it is an extraordinary confession of the realities of which we partake in the Lord’s Supper.

What is the posture of our worship and prayers to be? O Lord, we praise Thee, bless Thee, and adore Thee, in thanksgiving bow before Thee. We come before God bowed down in repentance. We understand that without the gifts of God, faith would fail.

And so, we beg God to be gracious to us, granting to us what He has promised to deliver. Thou with Thy body and Thy blood didst nourish our weak souls that they may flourish: O Lord, have mercy!

What is it that we receive in the sacrament? Is it some remembrance of Jesus, a memory of His body? No, it is not! It is the very, human body of Christ. It is the very human body which was borne by Mary for nine months, which walked the dusty roads between Galilee, Nazareth, Jerusalem, Samaria, and that region. His sojourn was in our flesh to carry our sins, our tribulations and sorrows to the tomb. The very blood He shed pleads for us before the Father – it begs that the Father grant us forgiveness in every trial we face, overcoming every fear which assails us, and that it strengthen us in all our needs of body and soul.

May Thy body, Lord, born of Mary, that our sins and sorrows did carry, and Thy blood for us plead in all trial, fear, and need: O Lord, have mercy!

Imagine the disciples as they sat around the table as Jesus first instituted this most, holy meal. First, He had surprised them by washing their feet. Then He gave them the bread from His plate, declaring it to be His body. Finally, He gave to them His cup, declaring it to be His blood – poured out for them for the forgiveness of sin.

They did not understand what would play out over the next day. Yes, Jesus had explained it to them on numerous occasions; that He would suffer many things at the hands of the elders, chief priests, and scribes, and be killed – even stating on one occasion that death would be by crucifixion – and that on the third day He would be raised. But, when it took place they were surprised! Simply stated, this can be grasped and believed only by faith.

But it was the very body seated at table with His disciples which was given unto death for them and for you.

Thy holy body into death was given, Life to win for us in heaven. No greater love than this to thee could bind us; may this feast thereof remind us! O Lord, have mercy!

Why would God do such a thing? Why would the Son of God obey His Father? Seriously, why die for those who are willfully disobedient, unwilling to give obey His Word and will for their lives? Our hymn’s second verse explains it so well.

Lord, Thy kindness did so constrain Thee that Thy blood should bless and sustain me. All our debt Thou hast paid; peace with God once more is made: O Lord, have mercy!

There is unity here! Yes, when we eat of this meal, the blood of Christ shed for us blesses and sustains us – Christ enters us and dwells within us. It means we do not believe that Jesus is just some invisible spirit who has promised to hover around us all the time – He is with us. He blood pulses in our veins. His is constrained to be with us in such an incredible way that His being with us blesses and sustains us in this life – and unto eternal life.

Before He ascended into heaven He spoke to His disciples, “All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth. Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, (obviously baptism) teaching them to observe all that I commanded you (the Word proclaimed); and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age (He didn’t need to say that He is always with them – like angels, in a spiritual sense – He is present with us in a new and unusual way, His Body; His Blood.”

On the cross His blood paid the debt we owe for our sinfulness. But it doesn’t just cry out from the cross, it cries out from us, from within us. And in us, peace with God once more is made – reestablished from the fall in the first garden.

Dearly beloved of God, how can we believe this? How can we trust God? How can we follow in the footsteps of our Savior, loving God and our neighbor as He has loved us? How can we live as the Body of Christ, His Church, here in this place? How can we come to love this Holy Meal, never despising it, but desiring more and more to partake of it?

May God bestow on us his grace and favor that we follow Christ our Savior and live together here in love and union nor despise this blest Communion! O Lord, have mercy!

Yes Lord, accomplish this in us. Lord let only Your mercy look upon us at all times. And out of that mercy, Lord answer this fervent prayer – and all our prayers.

It is Lord, your Spirit which lives in us to ever be mindful and thinking only of your will and grace. Help us to see at all times – as both individuals and as Your church –that we are one together, One in Christ.

Let there be peace among us always, that we might love one another as you have loved us. Keep us united in Christ that all our thoughts, prayers, and deeds might be a reflection of Your love given to us at this Holy Table.

Let not Thy good Spirit forsake us; grant that heav’nly-minded He make us; give Thy Church, Lord, to see days of peace and unity: O Lord, have mercy! Grant this to us Lord as we gather around your table with all your saints. Amen.