

## ***“Singing the Faith – The Sacrament of the Altar”***

“O Lord open my lips .... and my mouth will declare your praise.” This evening the Word of God has proclaimed His New Testament in the blood of Jesus Christ – and in that blood, He remembers our sins no more. We sing of the Lord’s grace – given to us in the Sacrament of the Altar – using Luther’s catechetical hymn – “O Lord, We Praise Thee.”

As you sing and hear the first stanza of the hymn – I want you to consider this question ..... “Where is Jesus?”

[We sing stanza 1 of LSB 617]

The Lord’s Supper is treasured, honored, and regularly celebrated amongst us – because the Lord Himself is present in this Holy Supper. “Where is Jesus?” “In thanksgiving [we] bow before Thee” you sang. Where is He? “Thou with Thy body and Thy blood didst nourish.” He’s right here, nourishing us with His Body and Blood.

We come to the Lord’s Table with heads bowed, kneeling in deep humility – for we know our sins, for they are always before us. But it is not just our sins that impact our approach – we stand before the Lord Himself, in honor and reverence, in thanksgiving we “bow before Thee.”

HERE – with His Body, “born of Mary.” God in the flesh Jesus – the body that carried the sin of the world (your sin and mine) and was pinned to the cross – the body given into death – then taken down and laid in the tomb of Joseph of Aramathea.

HERE – the very Body risen to life again on the third day – grasped by Mary Magdalene, shown to Thomas and the others. The very Body hidden by the cloud at His Ascension into heaven – which even now “plead” to Our Father on our behalf, “in all trial, fear, and need.” The very Body which you will see in all its glory when He Comes again on the clouds on the Last Day.

HERE and NOW – the true Body and Blood of Jesus Christ – the crucified, died, resurrected, ascended and coming again One. HERE and NOW – to “nourish our weak souls that they may flourish.”

The blessings of this Sacrament are robbed when it is taught that Jesus is not really HERE – that He is only in heaven, far, far away from us. We reject such teachings – even as we devote ourselves to this great treasure.

Our Lutheran Confession is this: “We unanimously reject and condemn all the following errors .... That in the holy sacrament the body of Christ is not received orally with the bread, but that with the mouth we receive only bread and wine and that we receive the body of Christ only spiritually by faith ... [We reject and condemn] That the bread and wine are only figures, images, and types of the far-distant body and blood of Christ ... [We reject and condemn] That the body of Christ is so enclosed in heaven that it can in no way be present at one and the same time in many places, still less in all places, where his Holy Supper is observed.” (Epitome VII)

Our reason cannot fathom the mystery of this Sacrament. It’s not that it “makes sense to us” that Christ’s Body and Blood are truly present and received in this Supper – but we live, not by reason alone, but by faith – listening to the Lord, who instituted and has given this Supper to His Church.

Jesus takes bread and says – “This is my body which is for you. Do this in remembrance of me.” He takes the cup and says – “This cup is the new covenant in my blood. Do this, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of me.”

The Lord’s Supper is what HE says it is – not what WE say it is. The Lord says that in this Supper, He is HERE with us --- just as He has promised – “I will be with you always, even unto the end of the age.”

The 2<sup>nd</sup> stanza of our hymn connects our Lord’s great love in His sacrificial death with His blessings given to those who eat and drink in faith. “This do in remembrance of me,” He says. As we sing this next stanza, let us be reminded of what Christ our Substitute has done for us.

[We sing the 2<sup>nd</sup> stanza]

When Adam and Eve feasted on the fruit of the tree – rather than eating the food that God had given them – what the Lord promised came true, “In the day you eat of it, you shall surely die.” Through Adam’s sin – death has come to all his descendants – down to us today.

This is why the Son of God becomes incarnate – takes on our human flesh and blood – so that by His flesh and blood, He might overcome death, and restore life to all the descendants of Adam.

God’s Word declares – “Greater love has no one than this, that someone lay down his life for his friends” (John 15:13). This is God’s love for you, in Christ Jesus. “Lord, Thy kindness did so constrain Thee, that Thy blood should bless and sustain me.” Because Jesus, the Son of God, shed His blood in payment for all your sin – “peace with God once more is made.”

The last stanza clearly proclaims how the Lord’s Supper bears fruit in our lives. “May God bestow on us His grace and favor ...” Listen, even as you sing this final stanza – that you might hear, and confess, that which sprouts forth from this “blest communion.”

[We sing the 3<sup>rd</sup> stanza]

The grace of God, given to us through the very Body and Blood of Jesus Christ – bears fruit in our lives. You sang of the fruits of His grace given to you.

“That we follow Christ our Savior.” Those whom He has made to be His disciples through the waters of Holy Baptism – He now nourishes and strengthens in the Supper – so that in faith, they may follow Him through the wilderness of this world.

“And live together here in love and union.” Yes, the Lord’s Supper strengthens us in FAITH toward God – and in fervent LOVE toward one another. His love for us enables us to love others. His uniting Himself to us – unites us to one another. God grant that we would not “despise this blest communion.”

“Grant that heavenly minded He make us.” Indeed, for “where there is the forgiveness of sins, there is life and salvation.” In this Supper, you are not just reminded – but given – heaven itself. Indeed, we pray that the “peace and unity” of heaven – would be given to His Church in these days.

And so we conclude, “O Lord, have mercy.” As with the Supper, this hymn abounds with the love and mercy of our Lord. In His mercy, He does not abandon us – but comes to us – gives us the fruit of His redemption, His very own Body and Blood – and in His forgiveness, He reconciles us to our heavenly Father.

O Lord open our lips – to receive your Body and Blood in faith – that by your mercy, our mouths may declare your praise forevermore. Amen.