

## JESUS IS HERE

1 Corinthians 10:16 | Holy Thursday | March 29, 2018

*Is not the cup of thanksgiving for which we give thanks a participation in the blood of Christ? And is not the bread that we break a participation in the body of Christ?*

### Juva Jesu

Dear brothers and sisters in Christ,

The Bible never attempts to explain the great mysteries of the faith in a way that will satisfy our understanding. For example, God doesn't explain how he was able to create the universe in less than a week's time. He simply tells us that's what he did. God doesn't discuss how he can be at the same time three persons and yet only one God. He simply says that he is. The Bible doesn't go into intricate clinical detail about how a virgin could give birth to a child. It simply reports that Mary **"gave birth to her firstborn, a son"** (Luke 2:7). You know something? The Bible doesn't even try to argue for the existence of God. From the very first verse the reality of God is just assumed. **"In the beginning, God ..."**

It's the same with Holy Communion. The Bible doesn't tell us how Jesus can give us his true body and blood in, with and under the forms of bread and wine. The Holy Spirit didn't see fit to explain how the blessings of forgiveness, life and salvation could be given to us through this eating and drinking. The Bible simply says that these things—these miracles—happen, every time we dine at our Savior's table.

God's Word before us today assures us that the Savior who promises to be with

us always is present in a very special way in the meal we call Holy Communion. JESUS IS HERE. He is here with true body and blood. He is here with real blessings for us.

### I. With True Body and Blood

Paul wrote the words of our text to a troubled congregation. The Corinthian Christians struggled with all kinds of problems: jealousy, factions, sexual sins, disorderly worship, misunderstanding of basic Christian teaching ... the list could go on. One thing that they struggled with was leaving their old pagan gods behind. Some of them were still attending feasts associated with these idols. To call one's self a Christian, and yet still participate in such an intimate communion with false gods was just plain wrong. So Paul warned them to **"flee from idolatry"** (10:14). And then he moved on to a different communion, a most blessed communion.

**Is not the cup of thanksgiving for which we give thanks a participation in the blood of Christ? And is not the bread that we break a participation in the body of Christ?** The old King James Version use the word *communion* instead of *participation*. Both words clearly teach the same idea. When we drink the wine we participate in the blood of Christ. When we eat the bread we commune

with the body of Christ. Both words describe an intimate connection with our Savior's body and blood.

Words are important. The word the Spirit chose here describes a coming together of two things. It describes a "fellowship," an intimate bond where two parties are brought into close contact with one another. Notice that Paul doesn't use words like *symbol* or *picture* or *illustration*, as in, "Is not the bread that we break a *symbol* of the body of Christ?" No. Nothing like that at all. Paul sticks with the clarity of Jesus' own words. "This is my body. This is my blood."

Let me ask you a couple of important questions. Can we commune with something that isn't there? Can we participate in something that isn't real? The answer is no both times. The bread and the wine are not mere pictures meant to stand in for Jesus' body and blood. They are not just symbols. The bread and the wine remain bread and wine in Holy Communion, but "in, with and under" those earthly elements we receive Jesus' true body and blood.

How? I don't know. It's a miracle. God never tries to explain how. And so I won't either. Too often human beings have tried to probe into mysteries that are beyond them and explain the how. Some have said that we receive the body and blood of Christ in only a "spiritual" way. Translation: We don't really receive them at all. Others have tried to describe the presence of Jesus' body with the bread of communion as being like meat in a pastry

or cream in a Twinkie. Such descriptions border on blasphemy. Some have flat out declared that we don't receive Jesus' body and blood at all because Jesus is in heaven and can't come down here. Besides, after all the millions who have received Communion over the centuries, Jesus body must be used up by now. Right?

My friends, all such things rely on and appeal to human reason. They take a majestic and miraculous mystery and turn it into something very common: A memorial meal in which bread sort of reminds us of Jesus' body and wine sort of reminds us of Jesus' blood. Trying to understand the doctrine of the Real Presence with our puny, sin-tainted minds is like trying to pour the Pacific into a coffee cup. It's just too much.

By God's grace we take God's Word seriously. I saw this on a bumper sticker: GOD SAID IT. I BELIEVE IT. THAT SETTLES IT. Actually, it's true whether we believe it or not. In, with and under wheat and wine Jesus gives us his true body and blood. Yes, the very same body and blood with which he won our salvation. This does not compute. This does not make sense. This seems totally unreasonable. And it is. Nevertheless, God's Word says it, and so that settles it. Jesus gives us his true body and blood. And he gives us blessings that are just as real.

## II. With Real Blessings for Us

Consider the words Jesus spoke on the night one of his own betrayed him, words that we repeat with reverence every time we celebrate the Sacrament: **Jesus took**

**bread, gave thanks and broke it, and gave it to his disciples, saying, “Take and eat; this is my body.”<sup>27</sup> Then he took the cup, gave thanks and offered it to them, saying, “Drink from it, all of you.<sup>28</sup> This is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins”** (Matthew 26:26-28).

Those last four words describe what the Lord’s Supper is all about. They tell us the wonderful benefit we receive in Holy Communion. They describe the one blessing we need most of all, the blessing from which all other blessings flow: the forgiveness of sins.

A starving man needs food. A sick man needs medicine. A drowning man needs a life guard. Sinners need forgiveness. We need forgiveness. Finally that is what worship is all about. Do we come here to see our Christian friends? Yes. Do we come here to praise and thank God with our hymns and our prayers, our time, talent and treasure? Absolutely. But worship isn’t primarily about what we give to God. It’s about what he gives to us. And what is it that he gives us? What is it that we need so desperately and deserve not at all? Forgiveness. Without God’s forgiveness we have nothing at all.

In Communion Jesus gives us the forgiveness that he won for us by his sin-free obedience. In Communion he gives us the pardon earned by his precious blood poured out on the cross in payment for all our sins. In Communion he gives us the release from guilt and freedom from eternal punishment of which his

victorious resurrection assures us. It’s the same forgiveness that we receive in Holy Baptism. It’s the same forgiveness we receive in the Absolution. It’s the same forgiveness with which we woke up this morning. It’s the same forgiveness that will allow us to have sweet sleep tonight. It’s the same forgiveness, you just receive it in a different way.

Isn’t Jesus’ clever? He could have just told us we were forgiven. But in his stop-at-nothing desire to assure us of the comfort and peace he earned for us by his flawless life and his priceless sacrifice, he shows us we are forgiven in another way.

Think of it like this: If I announced after church that everyone is invited over to my place for a cookout after the service, you would probably appreciate such an invitation. But if I came up to you personally after church, gave you a handwritten invitation with your name on it, and said, “Please come over for the cookout. It just wouldn’t be the same without you,” that’s an altogether different matter, isn’t it?

In Communion Jesus himself comes to you under the forms of bread and wine, takes you by the hand, looks you in the eye and says, “My dear child, take and eat my body, the very same body that was nailed to the cross for you. Drink of my blood, the very same blood that poured from my veins for you. I want you to know, beyond any doubt, that I love you, I forgive you and I want to spend eternity with you.”

At pastor’s conference a number of years ago a brother in ministry delivered a

paper in which he said that we pastors should smile as we serve the Sacrament. I understand his point. Often, it does bring a smile to my face. But just as often my face is more serious because I am simply in awe of what I am doing. It is my privilege to serve my fellow sinners a meal in which Jesus comes to give forgiveness, life and salvation. My friends, may God fill you with the same awe as you receive the Supper. May he enable each one of us to confess with joy, "Jesus is here—for me!" Amen.

**S.D.G.**