

Maundy Thursday 2009 “These Words” (The Sacrament of the Altar)

Tonight we conclude our series on **“The Six Chief Parts of Lenten Catechesis.”** So far we’ve been following the Catechism in looking at the basics of the Christian faith and life: The Ten Commandments, the Creed, the Lord’s Prayer, the Sacrament of Holy Baptism, and Confession. That brings us tonight to the Sacrament of the Altar.

Everything we want to say about the Sacrament tonight we can find in the words with which Christ institutes this holy meal. Which words? These words: **“Take eat; this is my body, which is given for you. This do in remembrance of me.” “Drink of it, all of you; this cup is the new testament in my blood, which is shed for you for the forgiveness of sins. This do, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of me.”**

“These Words”: The Words of Institution, the Words of Our Lord. These words will tell us what the Sacrament of the Altar is, its nature. These words will tell us what the Sacrament gives, its benefits. And these words will tell us how to receive the Sacrament worthily, its right reception. As Luther says in the Large Catechism, **“All these points are established through the words by which Christ has instituted this sacrament.”**

First, then, these words tell us what the Sacrament is. Jesus says it plainly: **“This is my body.” “This cup is the new testament in my blood.”** He says this of the bread and the wine he gives his disciples to eat and to drink. **“This is my body, this is my blood.”** What you are receiving, then, is the bread and the wine, yes, but not mere bread and wine. In, with, and under these elements, you are receiving the true body and blood of Christ.

How can this be? Because Christ says so. His words make it so. When we consider who it is speaking--Christ, the eternal Son of God, the Word made flesh--then we realize that his divine, creative, powerful words can do whatever he wants. And if he says that this is his body and blood, then this is his body and blood. Not only do these words tell us what the Sacrament is, these words make the Sacrament what it is.

“This is my body, this is my blood.” Don’t overlook the **“my.”** This is Jesus speaking. This is his body and blood. As he says, **“This do in remembrance of me.”** So our attention is drawn to the person of Christ, his whole ministry, and the particular context in which he says these words. Who it is speaking makes all the difference. And this is Jesus Christ, the only Son of God, come down from heaven, come in the flesh, to reveal God to us, to bring us back to God. And now, as he speaks these words, that saving mission is coming to a climax. **“On the night when he was betrayed,”** Christ institutes this sacrament.

He has entered into his Passion, his intense suffering, and within a few hours he will cry aloud, **“It is finished.”**

This is my body, this is my blood, **“given and shed,”** he says. Christ’s body, given into death. His blood, shed on the cross. This is what he is giving you; this is what you are receiving. The Sacrament connects us to the cross. Christ crucified, his body given, his blood shed--why? As the sacrifice for our sins. Our sins, our lawless deeds, our breaking of God’s commandments. Our sins separate us from God and condemn us to death. But there is one death that can cover all our sins and rescue us from death, and that is the death of God’s only Son, dying in our place. That’s why Jesus gives his body and sheds his blood on the cross. His death on the cross wins forgiveness for our sins, and with that forgiveness, then, life from the dead and eternal salvation, as his resurrection demonstrates and declares.

So all that Christ won for us on the cross he delivers to us in this sacrament. That brings us to the second point, what the Sacrament gives. And we find that too in Christ’s words of institution--specifically, in these words: **“Given and shed for you for the forgiveness of sins.”** The forgiveness of sins--there is the one benefit that brings with it all the other benefits. **“For,”** as Luther says so well, **“where there is forgiveness of sins, there is also life and salvation.”** In other words, if you take care of the sin problem, you also take care of the death problem and all the other damaging results of sin. And of course, you don’t take care of it, Christ does! And he gives those benefits to you! He does it in this sacrament. **“For you for the forgiveness of sins.”** There is the promise! There is the gift! **“For you.”** The promise and the gift, the forgiveness, life, and salvation--all for you!

Forgiveness--God remembers your sins no more! Do you feel your guilt? Are you troubled by your sins? Then come to the altar and receive the gift of God’s forgiveness. Life--new life now, eternal life forever. Life that heals your soul and that will bring wholeness to your body. Do you need nourishment for living the Christian life? Come to the altar and be refreshed and strengthened, in faith toward God and in fervent love for one another. Are you afraid of dying? Come to the altar and receive Christ’s pledge of everlasting life in this sacrament. Salvation--being safe in the loving care and strong protection of your heavenly Father. Are you worried about your future? Come to the altar and be assured of God’s love for you--he who loved you so much that he gave his only Son for you, that you would not perish but have eternal life. Life and salvation come with the forgiveness of sins that is given you at this altar in this sacrament. It all comes back to these words, **“Given and shed for you for the forgiveness of sins.”**

That brings us then to our third point, how to receive this sacrament worthily. Simply put, have faith in these words--we cannot emphasize them enough--**“Given and shed for you for the forgiveness of sins.”** Christ gave his body and shed his blood for you on the cross, and now he gives his body and blood

to you in this sacrament. **“This is my body, this is my blood.” Do you believe these words? Then come to the altar. His body and his blood are for the forgiveness of sins. This sacrament gives us just that. “For the forgiveness of sins.”** Do you believe these words? Then come to the altar. **“For you for the forgiveness of sins.”** This means that you are a sinner in need of forgiveness. Do you believe this? Then don't stay away, as though you're not good enough. God knows you're not good enough! That's precisely why he gives you this gift! So come and be forgiven! **“For you for the forgiveness of sins.”** Put your name in the **“for you.” “For Art.” “For Catherine.” “For Dick.” “For Barb.”** Whatever your name is, put it in the **“for you”** slot. That's what God does! Christ died on that cross for you, and this bread and this cup have your name on it. **“For you, for the forgiveness of sins.”**

It all comes back to the words, **“These Words”** of Christ Jesus our Savior: **“This is my body, this is my blood, given and shed for you for the forgiveness of sins.”** As the Catechism teaches, **“These words, along with the bodily eating and drinking, are the main thing in the Sacrament.”** Christ himself instituted this sacrament for us Christians to eat and to drink. So **“this do”!** Come to the altar this coming Holy Week and Easter and receive the great gift Christ has for you. Amen.