

## The Lord's Supper Is A Means Of Grace.

Text: 1 Cor 11:23-29

1) The Scriptural Teaching

Suggested Hymns:

2) The Salutary Use

301, 330, 329, 290, 462

The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit, be with you all. Amen.

The text for our sermon today is 1 Corinthians 11:23–29, <sup>23</sup> *For I received from the Lord that which I also delivered to you: that the Lord Jesus on the same night in which He was betrayed took bread; <sup>24</sup> and when He had given thanks, He broke it and said, “Take, eat; this is My body which is broken for you; do this in remembrance of Me.”*

<sup>25</sup> *In the same manner He also took the cup after supper, saying, “This cup is the new covenant in My blood. This do, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of Me.” <sup>26</sup> For as often as you eat this bread and drink this cup, you proclaim the Lord’s death till He comes.*

<sup>27</sup> *Therefore whoever eats this bread or drinks this cup of the Lord in an unworthy manner will be guilty of the body and blood of the Lord. <sup>28</sup> But let a man examine himself, and so let him eat of the bread and drink of the cup. <sup>29</sup> For he who eats and drinks in an unworthy manner eats and drinks judgment to himself, not discerning the Lord’s body. (NKJV)*

Lord God, heavenly Father, sanctify us through Your truth. Your Word is truth. Amen.

Dear friends in Christ,

The sermon today is the third and last in a series on “the means of grace.” Two weeks ago we heard that the Gospel is a means of grace; last Sunday we learned the same thing about Holy Baptism; and today the subject of the sermon is “The Lord’s Supper a Means of Grace.”

What is meant by the expression “means of grace” needs repetition. Here is a brief explanation. Through the preaching of the Gospel and the administration of the Sacraments — the so-called “means of grace” — God offers, conveys, and

imparts to sinners the grace which the Lord Jesus Christ earned through His suffering and death.

If this is true, and it is, then we should all prize more highly, and make more diligent use of, these means of grace.

Turning now to the subject before us, we find that three of the four Gospels tell us of the institution of the Lord's Supper. In addition, the Apostle Paul in his First Letter to the Corinthians gives us an historical account of it as well as important teachings concerning it. The latter passage shall serve as the basis of our message, but we shall also make use of the words recorded in the Gospels. May the Holy Spirit grant us His gracious guidance as we consider *The Lord's Supper a Means of Grace*. May the Lord bless our meditation.

## **1. The Lord's Supper A Means Of Grace**

### **The Scriptural Teaching**

All doctrines or teachings of the Church must be based on the Scriptures. Jesus told His followers to teach "*all things all things that I have commanded you.*"<sup>1</sup> He certainly included in these instructions the Holy Supper, which He instituted. So we turn to the Scriptures for an understanding of this important doctrine.

### **Instituted by Christ**

As we read the various accounts of the Lord's Supper in the Sacred Scriptures, there can be no doubt in our minds regarding its Author. In the text before us Paul clinches that thought with the very first words, for he writes: "*the Lord Jesus on the same night in which He was betrayed ...*"

Like Baptism, then, the Lord's Supper is a divine institution. That should mean very much to us and fill our hearts with a desire to understand it fully and appreciate its purpose as a means of grace.

### **The Time of Institution**

Then, too, we find that the time of its institution is specifically stated, namely, "*the same night in which He was betrayed.*" From the Gospels we learn that Jesus had gathered with His disciples in a certain Upper Room to observe the Passover Festival. This was an annual observance commanded by

God in commemoration of an event which took place when the Children of Israel left Egypt.

As a punishment for Pharaoh's hardness of heart in refusing to permit God's people to leave the land, God sent an angel to kill the first-born in every home of the Egyptians. But He told the Children of Israel to sprinkle their door-posts with blood, so that the angel of death would pass over and thus spare their first-born.

However, this event did more than merely commemorate the saving of the first-born children in Israel; it also typified the sacrifice which the promised Christ would bring for the sins of the world and thus make it possible for God to pass over, as it were, with His wrath all who trust in Him.

On the eve of this sacrifice we see Jesus, the promised Christ, observing the Passover with His disciples for the last time. It was then that the type came to an end, having fulfilled its purpose, and Jesus instituted the Holy Supper.

The Passover typified His sacrifice, and the Sacrament of the Altar was to memorialise this sacrifice. From this we observe that the Lord's Supper was to serve a direct purpose in bestowing the grace of God upon sinners for whom this sacrifice was to be made.

### **The "Real Presence"**

What has just been said will become even more apparent when we consider what Jesus did and said as He instituted this Sacrament. We are told that He took bread and gave it to His disciples to eat of it and that He also took the cup, containing wine, and gave it to them to drink of it. Accordingly, bread and wine are to be used in the celebration of this Holy Supper.

But from the words of institution it is evident that the body and blood of Christ are present and received by the communicants together with the bread and the wine. The words are plain and simple: "*Take, eat; this is My body ... This cup is the new covenant in My blood.*"

On the basis of these plain words of Scripture we believe in the "*Real Presence*" and teach that in, with, and under the bread Christ gives us His true body and in, with, and under the wine He gives us His true blood. This is indeed a mystery, but the omnipotent Lord can do and does many things which our finite reason cannot fully comprehend.

## The Gospel in the Sacrament

But there is more for us to consider in the words of institution. When Christ distributed the bread, He said: *“Take, eat; this is My body which is broken for you.”* When He distributed the wine, He said, as we read in Matthew 26:28, *“This is My blood of the new covenant, which is shed for many for the remission of sins.”* Note the words: *“Broken for you,”* and *“shed for many for the remission of sins.”*

With these words Jesus clearly referred to His vicarious suffering and death on the Cross and the shedding of His blood. The cause of My Passion, He would say, is sin and the sinner. The purpose is the redemption of the sinner, namely, to spare him the punishment which he had deserved by reason of his sins. The ultimate result is the remission of sins, namely, forgiveness, life, and salvation.

These words, which are by far the most important thing in the Sacrament, and which are repeated each time the visible elements of bread and wine are distributed, are the very Gospel message. They tell the communicants of their salvation in and through the death of Christ on the Cross.

That is also what the Apostle is saying and emphasising when he writes: *“<sup>26</sup>For as often as you eat this bread and drink this cup, you proclaim the Lord’s death till He comes.”* Indeed, the death of Christ — its cause, which was sin; its nature, which was extreme agony of body and soul; its fruit, which is remission of sins — all this is proclaimed, preached, each time the Sacrament is celebrated.

It is this message which really makes the Lord’s Supper a means of grace, the same as the Gospel, which is its chief content. You know what the Bible says of the Gospel: *“It is the power of God to salvation for everyone who believes.”<sup>2</sup>*

Luther expresses this thought very aptly in his Small Catechism. He asks: *What is the benefit of this eating and drinking?* and he answers: *These words, “Given and shed for you for the forgiveness of sins”, show us that in the Sacrament forgiveness of sins, life, and salvation are given to us through these words. For where there is forgiveness of sins, there is also life and salvation.*

In the Sacrament of the Altar, then, God offers to the communicants the forgiveness of sins which Christ earned. It is for this reason that we call the Lord's Supper a means of grace.

### **A Means of Grace for You**

All that has been said is based on the Scriptures and should serve to impress upon our hearts that the Lord's Supper is indeed a means of grace also for us Christians of the 21st century. Each time we take the blessed Sacrament, the words "*given and shed for you for the forgiveness of sins*" should serve to strengthen our faith in the forgiveness of sins and at the same time inspire us to holy living.

In addition, let us note that the Lord really gives us a pledge or seal of the forgiveness of our sins by giving us His body and His blood under the bread and the wine. What comfort, what peace, what strength, what joy, is contained in this Scriptural teaching that the Lord's Supper is a means of grace!

## **2. The Lord's Supper A Means Of Grace**

### **The Salutory Use**

#### **"This Do"**

There is another thought for us to consider concerning the Lord's Supper as a means of grace, namely, its salutory use.

Christ said: "*This do!*" He thus commands and exhorts His followers to use the Sacrament which He has instituted. Failure on the part of the Church to celebrate the Sacrament and on the part of individual members of the Church to use it, would not only be contrary to His last will and testament, but would at the same time deprive His followers of the blessings which He made possible and intended for them. It is evident, then, that the Lord wants the Sacrament to be used, and used in accordance with His will.

#### **Frequently**

Christ instituted His Supper for our frequent use. He Himself has said in the words of institution: "*This do, as often as you drink it.*" Paul takes up this same thought in the text and says: "*as often as you eat this bread and drink this cup.*"

Nowhere will we find recorded the exact number of times that a Christian should partake of the Sacrament. But this we can say: We should often appear as guests at the Lord's Table. If we fail to do so, we despise the blessings which are there dispensed and which we need for our faith and life. Is there any reason why we should not come as often as we have opportunity to do so?

Think of the devil, the world, and our own flesh! How they try to rob us of our faith and to fill our heart and life with misbelief, despair, and other great shame and vice! Let us, then, be motivated both by the command of Christ and our own need to make frequent use of the Lord's Supper as a means of grace.

### **Worthily**

The salutary use of the Sacrament as a means of grace includes also this, that we use it worthily. The Apostle Paul issues two warnings on this point in the text. *“<sup>27</sup> Therefore whoever eats this bread or drinks this cup of the Lord in an unworthy manner will be guilty of the body and blood of the Lord. ... <sup>29</sup> For he who eats and drinks in an unworthy manner eats and drinks judgment to himself, not discerning the Lord's body.”*

According to these plain words, the very opposite of blessings can result from partaking of the Lord's Supper. This danger should move everyone to ask: “In what does true worthiness consist?” Look once again at the words of institution. Christ says: *“This do in remembrance of Me.”*

We should remember that it was sin, our sin also, which made it necessary for Him to suffer and die. We should remember that by His suffering and death He earned forgiveness of sin and thus made it possible for us to have forgiveness, life, and salvation.

We should remember that another purpose of His suffering and death was this, that *“that those who live should live no longer for themselves, but for Him who died for them and rose again.”<sup>3</sup>* Paul therefore exhorts his readers: *“<sup>28</sup> But let a man examine himself, and so let him eat of the bread and drink of the cup.”*

Our Catechism lists three questions which we should ask ourselves as part of our examination before going to the Lord's Table. They are: 1) are we truly

sorry for our sins; 2) do we believe in our Saviour Jesus Christ; 3) do we plan, with the help of the Holy Spirit, to change our sinful lives.

If we examine ourselves like this, we will be better prepared to appear as worthy guests at the Lord's Table and in that way also make a salutary use of this means of grace.

May our hearts be grateful for the precious means of grace which God Himself has ordained and instituted to make and keep us as His very own and at the same time enable us to live holy lives pleasing to Him. May we make diligent use of these means of grace and to our dying day experience their rich blessings in our life. Amen.

The peace of God, which passes all understanding, will keep our hearts and minds, in Christ Jesus. Amen.

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<sup>1</sup> Matthew 28:20

<sup>2</sup> Romans 1:16

<sup>3</sup> 2 Corinthians 5:15