

At All Times and in All Places: Liturgical Reflections on the Sacrament

Introduction

Ceremonies... ought to be observed both to teach men Scripture, and that those admonished by the Word may conceive faith and fear [of God, and obtain comfort], and thus also may pray (for these are the designs of ceremonies).¹ So says Article XXIV of the Apology which addresses abuses in the Mass. Now if one of the main purposes of liturgy is to teach Biblical truths by repetition, what do our liturgies have to teach us about the Lord's Supper? For the next 45 minutes we'll explore what our liturgies have to say about the nature of the Supper and its purpose and what they suggest concerning the frequency with which it should be offered. We'll also look at some of the differences between our liturgies and those of Rome, Constantinople, and Canterbury. I've entitled the paper "At All Times and in All Places: Liturgical Reflections on the Sacrament."

Let us begin with prayer.

What Is This Supper?

"Grant us Your Spirit, gracious Father, that we may give heed to the testament of Your Son in true faith and, above all, firmly take to heart the words with which Christ gives to us His body and blood for our forgiveness."²

The Words of Institution

This little prayer, a portion of the preface in *Lutheran Service Book's* Setting V, directs our attention to the principle source from which we Lutherans draw our understanding of the Lord's Supper: Christ's Words of Institution. It is from those words that our catechism derives the nature of the Sacrament, its purpose and benefit, and even who may receive the Sacrament. These words truly are the chief thing in the Sacrament along with the bodily eating and drinking. They bear the power of God that accomplishes and fulfills Christ's promise and they awaken faith in our hearts and prepare us to receive Christ's gifts. Without these words there is no sacrament and without hearing them, the people will not be taught or reminded of what they are receiving and their faith will not be strengthened. Therefore, these words should be spoken audibly every time the Sacrament is offered, even if the elements have already been consecrated.

What do these words tell us about the Sacrament?

What is the Sacrament of the altar? It is the body and blood of Christ.

What am I to do with it? Should I adore Christ in the bread? No, Christ says I am to eat the bread and to drink from the cup.

Why does Christ want me to do this? He says the body and blood he gives bestow the forgiveness of sins. With that forgiveness we also receive eternal life and salvation. The three are inseparable as the scriptures testify, for Christ also said, "Whoever eats my flesh and drinks my blood has eternal life, and I will raise him up at the last day."³

In his words of institution Christ also says, "Do this in remembrance of me." Therefore, as often as I eat and drink of this holy food, I am proclaiming his death and,

therefore, I cannot allow the supper to become an empty ritual or to be associated with the worship of other gods or false christs.

Who should receive the Sacrament? The bread is for Christ's disciples and he says to them "drink of it all of you," that is, it is given for all the baptized who hear Christ's words "given and shed for you for the forgiveness of sins" and who, because they believe those words, come to fill their hunger and quench their thirst for righteousness.

Should the laity receive the cup or is the host sufficient? Christ says "drink of it all of you." Therefore, everyone who receives the Sacrament should receive it in both kinds.

You see, then, the importance of these words and why they have always been included in each of our liturgies and why they are spoken to the people every time the Sacrament is offered. Christ has much to teach us with these few words and many abuses would be avoided if we just paid better attention to them.

Because these words are meant for the people, I think that it is better to speak them facing the people rather than facing the wall and that it is better for them to be set out as plainly as possible in the service rather than being buried in the midst of long-winded prayers. Consequently, I prefer simpler and more traditional forms and will omit the prayers that were added in *Lutheran Worship* and *Lutheran Service Book* when I can do so without causing confusion.

Having made a good beginning by unpacking some of what the Words of Institution have to teach us about the Sacrament, let us move on to examine what we may learn from other elements of our liturgies.

Old and New Themes from Our Liturgies

The Common Service of 1888, more commonly known in the LCMS as “page 15” and today as Setting III, was created by a committee composed of representatives from several English-speaking synods. They examined a number of different liturgies from the 16th century and selected the elements that were the most widely used. This was done as the General Synod and other English speaking synods were turning away from “American Lutheranism” and “new methods” to a more confessional faith. The resulting service provided English versions of the text and canticles. The service borrowed heavily from the Anglican *Book of Common Prayer*,⁴ though many of the elements had already been used in various Lutheran service books. Even though the Missouri Synod had not participated in its development, a lightly edited version of the service was adopted for use in the English district and, as English became the dominant language in synod, it eventually became the standard service. Its adoption was probably made easier by its similarity to the rite in Loehe’s agenda. The similarity was due both to a similarity of method and the committee’s use of Loehe’s work.⁵

The introduction of the *Lutheran Book of Worship* and its derivative, *Lutheran Worship*, gave the LCMS new settings of the liturgy that included new canticles with different, but complementary, views of the Sacrament. These settings retained the traditional canticles with their focus on reconciliation with God, but offered another set of ordinaries, intended primarily for the Easter season, that stressed celebration of Christ’s victory over death and the grave and the eventual consummation of that victory at the marriage feast of the Lamb in his kingdom.

The Traditional Canticles and the Theme of Reconciliation with God.

The ordinary canticles included in the Common Service are the *Kyrie*, *Gloria in Excelsis*, Offertory, *Sanctus*, *Agnus Dei*, and *Nunc Dimitus*. One may think of them as corresponding roughly to the seasons of the church year: Advent, Christmas, Lent, Palm Sunday, Good Friday, and Easter. They certainly reflect Christ's work, proclaiming the Lord's birth, death, and resurrection for our salvation and reconciliation with God.

The Kyrie and Gloria in Excelsis

The *Kyrie* and *Gloria* combine to present our need for mercy and the incarnation of the Son of God that answered that need. In the *Gloria*, we echo the song of the angels on Christmas Eve: "Glory be to God on High and on earth peace, goodwill toward men."⁶ The peace or *shalom* of the *Gloria* is received with the Christ in the Sacrament. It remains with God's people in life and death as the *Nunc Dimitus* and the Benediction declare.

The *Gloria* also begins to lay the groundwork for the astounding claims of the Words of Institution by reminding us that Jesus Christ, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sins of the world, is the only begotten Son of the Father, who has ascended to the Father's right hand where he reigns in divine glory. He has been born of a woman, but is able to accomplish God's plan for salvation and to bless us with the gifts of his body and blood in the Sacrament for he is, as the *Gloria* proclaims, both Lord and God.

The Offertory

Three Offertories were provided for use with the Common Service. The Lutheran Hymnal chose the "Create in Me," which has often been interpreted as a response to the

proclamation of God's Word. Its proper function, however, is that of a bridge between the Service of the Word and the celebration of the Sacrament.⁷ What the Offertory cries for, the Sacrament provides. As a tangible Gospel and means of grace, it refashions our hearts and renews our spirits, restoring our joy by assuring of us that the salvation, which God has wrought, is also given to each of us.

The Sanctus

According to Luther Reed, in the *Sanctus* “the congregation dramatically joins in the song of the angels. It is a solemn act of adoration and thanksgiving in the spirit of holy awe. It has been called ‘the most ancient, the most celebrated, and the most universal of Christian hymns.’”⁸ We praise and glorify the Father because, in the words of one of our Christmas hymns, “today he opens heaven again and gives us his own Son.”⁹

When in the midst of the *Sanctus* we begin to cry out “Hosanna” and “Blessed is he that comes in the name of the Lord,” we are calling upon Christ to *come* into our midst and bring us the salvation which he accomplished for us upon the cross.

But how does Christ come into our midst? In the Sacrament, of course! Instead of humbly riding upon a lowly donkey, Christ comes cloaked in common bread and wine, that we may receive him without fear, in great joy.

This association between the *Sanctus* and Christ's presence is the reason that the canticle is sometimes found after the Words of Institution in Lutheran liturgies. Luther himself placed it there in both his Latin and German services. Our Setting V and other hymn services based on Luther's *Deutsche Messe* also place the *Sanctus* after the Words of Institution.¹⁰ When the *Sanctus* has been used in this position, it has been common to

elevate the cup during the Hosanna, demonstrating visually the doctrine of the real presence.¹¹

The Agnus Dei

In the *Agnus Dei*, we call upon Christ who takes away the sins of the world to have mercy upon us and take away our sin as we receive his body and blood in the Sacrament. Reed notes, “the reference to Christ as a lamb recalls to the worshipper not only the sacrificial character of his death, but also his freedom from guilt, his patience and gentleness, and his voluntary submission to sufferings and death. Thus, reception of the elements in the Holy Communion is intimately connected with our Lord’s sacrifice on Calvary.”¹²

The Nunc Dimitus

By the time we sing the *Nunc Dimitus*, we have, like Simeon, held the incarnate Christ in our hands. In the bread and wine, we have seen the salvation which God has prepared and have been enlightened and enlivened by what we have received. We are therefore ready to depart in peace from the altar and from this life.

Summary

All of the canticles we have just considered point us to Christ and his sacrifice on our behalf. The emphasis is on the forgiveness of sins and the salvation we receive. The same theme is picked up in most of our Proper Prefaces and in the traditional Post Communion Collects. However, as noted previously, we also have some new canticles and prayers that look at the supper from a different perspective. We turn now to consider that new theme.

A New Theme: The Feast of Christ's Victory

Lutheran Worship introduced three new canticles to the LCMS: "This is the Feast," "Let the Vineyards Be Fruitful," and "Thank the Lord and Sing His Praise." These, taken in combination with the Prayer of Thanksgiving--introduced from the *Service Book and Hymnal*--brought a new emphasis upon the Sacrament as a celebration of Christ's victory, a celebration that would continue at the Messianic Banquet at the end of time. That theme has been further amplified in the *Lutheran Service Book* which has added a new Post Communion Collect and replaced the Exhortation in Luther's *Deutsche Messe* with a "Preface" that concludes with a statement of the new theme. Let's take a look at each of these elements in turn and see how the new theme has been incorporated.

This is the Feast

"This is the Feast" was originally intended to be used during the Easter season. The feast referred to was Easter itself, not the supper. However, many congregations adopted the new canticle for year-round use and sing "This is the Feast" on communion Sundays and the *Gloria in Excelsis* on non-communion Sundays. As a result, the Sacrament has become for many "the Feast of Victory for Our God."

The feast is celebrated with words taken from the heavenly chorus of the fifth chapter of Revelation. The heavenly choir sings an ascription of praise to Christ that is joined by "every creature in heaven and on earth and under the earth (Rev. 5:13)." Now the celebration has moved from heaven to earth as Revelation said it would and we join the angels and archangels, the elders, and cherubim, in recognizing Christ's glory.

This is not completely new. For more than a thousand years the church has sung "At the Lamb's High Feast We Sing," with its explicit references to the Eucharist, as a

communion hymn during Easter. You will recall the rest of the first line is “praise to our victorious king.”¹³ With the new canticle, the theme of this ancient hymn has moved into the liturgy and in our new hymnal, the hymn itself has moved from the Easter section to the section entitled “The Lord’s Supper.”

Let the Vineyards Be Fruitful

The Offertory “Let the Vineyards Be Fruitful” was written for the *Lutheran Book of Worship* and was retained for Divine Service II of *Lutheran Worship*. It is strongly sacramental, asking God to bless fields and vineyards so that we might be fed with the Sacrament. It closes with the request that God would bless us with “a foretaste of the feast to come.”¹⁴ Lutheran Service Book has removed the canticle from the ordinary text of the liturgy, but the tag line “a foretaste of the feast to come” has appeared in other places.

Thank the Lord

The last of the new canticles was “Thank the Lord.” In this canticle we rejoice in the Lord, his great deeds, the fulfillment of his promises, and the joy with which he leads his people. The words and music are celebratory and lead us to associate the Sacrament with God’s mighty deeds of old. As such it fits much better with “This is the Feast” than the *Nunc Dimitus*.

Prayer of Thanksgiving

The Prayer of Thanksgiving after the *Sanctus* came to us from the *Service Book and Hymnal* via *Lutheran Worship*. In *Lutheran Service Book* it has been expanded to include this petition from the conclusion of the general prayer in Divine Service I of

Lutheran Worship: “Gather us together, we pray, from the ends of the earth to celebrate with all the faithful the marriage feast of the Lamb in His kingdom which has no end.”

New Post Communion Collect

Lutheran Service Book has further incorporated the theme of celebratory feast by adding a new Post Communion Collect that picks up the tag line from “Let the Vineyards Be Fruitful.” It reads

“Gracious God, our heavenly Father, you have given us a foretaste of the feast to come in the Holy Supper of Your Son’s body and blood. Keep us firm in the true faith throughout our days of pilgrimage that, on the day of his coming, we may, together with all Your saints celebrate the marriage feast of the Lamb in His kingdom which has no end...”

As we shown above, this new theme that has worked its way into our liturgies isn’t really new—it has been around for centuries. What is new is its placement within our liturgies, themselves. There is probably little harm in this as long as the old themes of atonement, forgiveness, and peace are also visited regularly. But I do caution you not to let them be fully supplanted by the newer canticles. We humans tend to avoid talk about sin and the cost of our redemption, but such talk is a vital part of communicating our faith. In addition, we must be careful lest in our desire to reflect the “now/not yet” character of our salvation, we spend all our time looking forward to what is to come, rather than thanking God for the gifts he gives today.

Having looked at some of the things our liturgies would teach us about the Sacrament, let’s take a few minutes to examine how the liturgies of other traditions reflect their ideas of why this Supper has been instituted.

Other Traditions

Roman

Although there have been important changes to the Roman Mass since Vatican II, the old Latin mass is still in use in the Roman church and may even be making a comeback now that Pope Benedict XVI has removed some of the restrictions on its use. This mass exists to ensure the preservation of the doctrines of the council of Trent. Pope Pius the V had examined the various missals in use in Catholic lands after the Council of Trent and settled upon a standard order that he commanded be used in perpetuity.

How does the Latin mass differ from our orders of service and how does it carry out the instructions of the council to “exclude all danger, in liturgical worship, of errors against the faith”¹⁵ especially those of Luther and the other Protestants?

For the Living and the Dead

A look at any English translation of the service (or the Latin, if your Latin is better than mine) will show that the text of the mass plainly states that it is a sacrifice for the sins of the living and the dead, a re-presentation of Christ’s sacrifice upon the cross. For example the Offertory contains the following prayers:

Accept, O holy Father, almighty, eternal God, this immaculate Host, which I, thy unworthy servant, *offer unto thee*, my living and true God, for the innumerable sins, offenses, and negligences, and for all here present, as also for all faithful Christians, *both living and dead*, that it may be profitable for my own and their salvation unto life eternal. Amen.¹⁶ (Emphasis mine).

We *offer unto thee*, O Lord, the chalice of salvation, beseeching thy clemency, that in the sight of thy divine Majesty, *it may ascend* with the odor of sweetness, for our salvation, and for that of the whole world. Amen.¹⁷ (Emphasis mine).

These prayers plainly proclaim what sort of sacrifice the Roman church believes the mass to be. The doctrine is repeated several times in the canon of the mass. Among the more interesting of the repetitions is this prayer:

We most humbly beseech thee, almighty God, command these things to be carried by the hands of thy holy angel to the altar on high, the sight of the divine Majesty, that as many of us as, by participation at this altar, shall receive the most sacred Body and Blood of thy Son may be filled with all heavenly benediction and grace.¹⁸

Most of those present probably know that there have been those who have very strongly opposed the new orders of service that were promulgated after the second Vatican council. What you may not realize is that the reason for the opposition has not been simply a fear of change, but a recognition that the new services do not teach the Roman doctrine of the mass as clearly or as well as the old Latin service.

About the time the new orders were being released, Cardinals Ottviani and Bacci wrote a letter to Pope Paul the VI complaining about the new services. Among the reasons they cite were inadequate presentation of the doctrine of transubstantiation and a de-emphasis on the mass as a sacrifice for sins. At that time, Cardinal Ottaviani was Prefect of the Congregation of the Holy Office, which was the former name of the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith.¹⁹

The following paragraph fits well with the topic of this paper. The eminent cardinals wrote: "Of Canon II it has been well said, among other things, that it could be recited with perfect tranquility of conscience by a priest who no longer believes either in Transubstantiation or in the sacrificial character of the Mass--hence even by a Protestant minister."²⁰

I think we Lutherans should cheer such a change, even if the official catechisms still continue to teach the old doctrines. Such changes may be one reason why so many

lay people fail to see the differences in the Roman and Lutheran rites and, therefore, between our churches.

Earlier, we noted that eschatological elements have been introduced to our liturgies by some of the newer canticles and prayers. Something similar was done in the new Roman liturgies. Here is what Ottviani and Bacci have to say about these elements:

The acclamation assigned to the people immediately after the Consecration: ("We announce thy death, O Lord, until Thou comest") introduces yet again, under cover of eschatology, the same ambiguity concerning the Real Presence. Without interval or distinction, the expectation of Christ's Second Coming at the end of time is proclaimed just at the moment when He is substantially present on the altar, almost as though the [parousia], and not the [the real presence], were the true Coming.²¹

The Offertory has also changed. Again from the cardinal's letter:

The Novus Ordo changes the nature of the offering turning it into a sort of exchange of gifts between man and God: man brings the bread, and God turns it into the "bread of life"; man brings the wine, and God turns it into a "spiritual drink."

Thou art blessed Lord God of the Universe because from thy generosity we have received the bread (or wine) which we offer thee, the fruit of the earth (or vine) and of man's labour. May it become for us the bread of life (or spiritual drink)."

There is no need to comment on the utter indeterminateness of the formulae "bread of life" and "spiritual drink", which might mean anything.²²

Canterbury

Having established that the traditional mass of the Roman church taught quite differently about the nature of the Supper than our Lutheran rites and that some positive changes have occurred, let us move on to take a quick look at the Anglican service from the old *Book of Common Prayer*. Like the Roman service, the service from Canterbury is similar to ours. (You may remember that it was stated above that many portions of our liturgy were borrowed from the *Book of Common Prayer*.)

The first difference to note is an exhortation to the communicants that “fences the table.” Such fencing is common in Reformed liturgies. In the *Book of Common Prayer*, the priest says to those who are coming to communion:

Ye, who do truly and earnestly repent of your sins, and are in love and charity with your neighbours, and intend to lead a new life, following the commandments of God, and walking from henceforth in his holy ways; Draw near with faith, and take this holy Sacrament to your comfort; and make your humble confession to Almighty God, devoutly kneeling²³

In this way, the communicants are warned to come in true repentance.

As the service continues, the congregants are reminded that Christ’s sacrifice atoned for their sins and that the sacrifice they are offering is a sacrifice of thanksgiving.

Speaking to God the priest says:

Thou of thy tender mercy didst give thine only Son, Jesus Christ, to suffer death upon the Cross for our redemption; who made there (by his one oblation of himself once offered) a full, perfect, and sufficient sacrifice, oblation, and satisfaction for the sins of the whole world²⁴

Unfortunately, the prayer does not stop there. It goes on to present the Lord’s Supper as an ordinance of remembrance:

[Christ] did institute, and in his holy Gospel command us to continue, a perpetual memory of that his (*sic*) precious death and sacrifice until his coming again.²⁵

Nonetheless, the *Book of Common* prayer goes on to use the language of the real presence referring to the communicants as “partakers of his most blessed Body and Blood”²⁶ and includes prayers that they may “worthily receive the most precious Body and Blood of thy Son Jesus Christ”²⁷ and “so to eat the flesh of thy dear Son Jesus Christ and to drink his blood, that our sinful bodies may be made clean by his body, and our souls washed through his most precious blood.”²⁸

The eucharistic prayers in the service also address some themes that are not addressed in our services, though they are commonly referred to in our preaching and

teaching. For example, the communicants are reminded that they are made one body with Christ and that, as part of their sacrifice of thanksgiving, they also offer their bodies and souls unto God as a reasonable, holy, and living sacrifice.²⁹

The Great Thanksgiving

Having taken a brief, comparative detour from our own liturgies to examine samples from Rome and Canterbury, we now turn our attention to a theme that appears in many communion liturgies, our own included: The Great Thanksgiving.

This theme, of course, comes from the Preface to the communion. “It is truly meet, right, and salutary” or in more modern language “right, proper, and beneficial” that we should at all times and in all places give thanks unto God.

The Eastern Orthodox *Liturgy of St. John Chrysostom* goes far beyond our own in the thanks that are offered in the Preface by praising God for his very nature and being, his work of salvation, and the ministry given to the church.

It is meet and right to hymn thee, to bless thee, to praise thee, to give thanks to thee, to worship thee, in every part of thy dominion. For thou art God, ineffable, inconceivable, invisible, incomprehensible, the same from everlasting to everlasting; thou and thine only Son and the Holy Ghost. For thou broughtest us forth to being from nothing, and when we had fallen didst raise us up again, and gavest us not over until thou hadst done every thing that thou mightest to bring us to heaven and bestow upon us thy kingdom to come. For all these things we give thanks to thee, and to thine only begotten Son, and thy Holy Ghost, for thy benefits which we know and which we know not, manifest and concealed, which thou hast bestowed upon us. We give the thanks also for this ministry which thou hast vouchsafed to receive at our hands: although there stand by thee thousands of archangels, and ten thousands of angels, the Cherubim, and the Seraphim that have six wings, sing, vociferating, shouting, and saying the triumphal hymn:³⁰

The Works of God

We are not quite as verbose. In our versions of the Preface, and some versions of the Prayer of Thanksgiving, we thank and praise God for different aspects of his work of

salvation. We recite some portion of God's work and plan for our salvation concluding with "therefore..." In this way, the Proper Preface shows that the glory of God is seen chiefly in the work of Christ.

We praise God for the Baptist who prepared Christ's way, for the miracle of the incarnation, for manifesting his glory in Christ, for overcoming our enemy the devil, for the crucifixion and resurrection of Christ, for his ascension into heaven where he intercedes for us, for the gift of the Spirit whom Christ poured out upon his people, and for destroying death and opening to us the way of everlasting life. No wonder we join all the company of heaven in praising God and singing.

The Gifts We Have

What great gifts He gives us in the Sacrament—the forgiveness of sins, eternal life, salvation, reconciliation, peace, all along with the holy body and blood of our Lord.

He also blesses us with his personal presence.

While we are giving thanks, we may also properly remember all the other blessings and benefits we seek for ourselves and others, whether they come through water, bread and wine, or Word, or by God's gracious providence and protection. The reminder of the *Liturgy of St. John Chrysostom* that we give thanks for "benefits which we know and which we know not, manifest and concealed"³¹ is surely appropriate.

The Gifts to Come

We also give thanks for gifts yet to come. We remember and rejoice in the hope of everlasting life, the feast that is to come, and the revelation of Christ's glory and his eternal kingdom.

All these, the works of God, our present blessings, and the gifts to come, are part of our thanksgiving and the reason that we so often refer to the service surrounding the Sacrament as a celebration.

How Often Should We Do This?

How often should we celebrate these things? How often should the Sacrament be offered? Let us begin, again, with the Words of Institution. Christ says “Do this.” Therefore, we may not leave it undone. But, he also says, “as often as you do it.” With these words, Christ indicates that his gifts will be present and that he should be remembered whenever and wherever that Sacrament is offered according to his command. It is essential that you note that by this phrase he refuses to make a law of his grace. He does not specify when or how often the Sacrament is to be offered. Had he done so, there would have been congregations or Christians at various times and in various places that would be unable to keep any such command due to poverty, illness, isolation, or lack of a pastor, and who may have fallen into despair as a consequence. Rather than burden our consciences with the command that his supper be offered every Lord’s day or every year at Passover, Christ allows his grace, the benefits of the Sacrament, and our desire for him, to draw us into frequent communion.

At All Times and In All Places

The introduction to the Proper Preface suggests that the Sacrament is never inappropriate. That the thanksgiving referred to in the preface is the Sacrament is strongly suggested by the word “salutary” as well as its placement in the service. The word “salutary” ranges in meaning from beneficial to bearing salvation. At the end of the

communion we give thanks that God has blessed us with this salutary gift—a clear reference to the Sacrament. It is likely, therefore, that the first salutary also refers to the benefits of the Sacrament and that the introduction to the preface is more than a simple encouragement to live thankfully at all times. If one agrees with this view, then one must also agree that the Sacrament is always meet, right, and salutary; that is, it is always right, proper, and beneficial to offer it.

Give Us This Day Our Daily Bread

Wherever the mass has been celebrated daily, it has also been customary to interpret the petition “Give us this day our daily bread” as a reference to the Sacrament. The inclusion of the Lord’s Prayer in such close proximity to the consecration and distribution of the Supper invites such a connection. Luther himself interpreted the petition this way in one of his early prayer books; though, later, in his catechisms, he interprets daily bread as those things which pertain to support of our bodies. The two are not mutually exclusive, for there must be bread to celebrate the Sacrament, and if there is only a little bread, the Sacrament may be the best use for it. Suffice to say that the use of the Lord’s Prayer in the liturgy invites us to at least consider offering and receiving the Sacrament daily.

Given and Shed For YOU

As a communicant, Christ’s words “given and shed for you” invite me to commune every time the Sacrament is offered. They are not given and shed for “them,” but for “us.” For this reason when I have been confronted with multiple communion services on the same day, I have communed at all of them. I am not in fellowship with

the early service, but not the late one; nor am I in any less need of grace later in the morning. In both services my need and Christ's gracious Word bring me to my knees to receive his body and blood.

On the other hand, as a pastor, the same words, along with Christ's commands to eat and drink, tell me that there must be communicants before the Sacrament can be legitimately offered. Here Christ's word places limits on the frequency of the celebration. I may desire to offer the Sacrament to my congregation weekly, but if no one comes and presents himself I cannot continue. The sacrament is not intended for private celebration, but for the communion of saints.

In smaller congregations such limitations become real and important. Although Melancthon wrote that the Sacrament was offered every Lord's Day and at all the chief festivals, this was not necessarily the practice in the village parishes.³² Encouragement to frequent communion was given, but what would "frequent" mean to people who were used to receiving communion once a year? When there were no communicants, the rubrics specified that the service be terminated without the Words of Institution and distribution.³³ Our old practice of announcing for communion was not only to permit the pastor to examine those who wished to commune, it also allowed him to be sure there would be communicants.

It appears then that a good liturgical rule for how often to offer the Sacrament would be to offer it as often as you can persuade people to come.

Conclusion

Hopefully, this journey through our liturgies and the liturgies of others has pointed out some things you might have missed or reminded you of things you had not

thought about in awhile. Perhaps, this paper can best be summarized by saying our liturgies have a lot to say about the Sacrament of the Altar, its nature, its purpose, and even how often it should be celebrated.

¹ Apology to the Augsburg Confession, Article XXIV: Of the Mass. Concordia Triglotta (English), (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1917) as reproduced electronically and distributed by Project Wittenburg. File date Nov. 3, 2001.

² Commission on Worship of the Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod, *Lutheran Service Book*, (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 2006), 216.

³*The New International Version*, (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House) 1984.

⁴ Luther Reed, *The Lutheran Liturgy*, Rev. Ed., (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1959), p. 195.

⁵ Reed, *The Lutheran Liturgy*, 153

⁶ LSB, 187

⁷ Reed, *The Lutheran Liturgy*, p. 311

⁸ Reed, *The Lutheran Liturgy*, p. 330.

⁹ “Let All Together Praise Our God,” LSB, 389.

¹⁰ Curiously, the hymn Luther wrote to replace the Sanctus in the Deutsche Messe contains only Isaiah 6. See LSB, 960.

¹¹ Reed, *The Lutheran Liturgy*, p. 332.

¹² Reed, *The Lutheran Liturgy*, p. 369.

¹³ LSB, 633

¹⁴ LSB, 955

¹⁵ . “Letter from Cardinals Ottviani and Bacci to His Holiness Pope Paul VI.” (Rome, Sept. 25, 1969) English translation from <http://www.catholic-pages.com/mass/ottaviani.asp>, Sept. 10, 2007

¹⁶ This translation is from Richard, J. W. and Painter, F. V. N., *Christian Worship its Principles and Forms*, 2nd Ed., (Philadelphia: Lutheran Publication Society, 1908), p. 128

¹⁷ Ibid, p. 129

¹⁸ Ibid, p. 135

¹⁹ <http://www.catholic-pages.com/mass/>, Sept.10, 2007

²⁰ Cardinals Ottviani and Bacci

²¹ Ibid

²² Ibid

²³ Taken from the side by side comparison of these services in Reed, p. 713

²⁴ Ibid, 723

²⁵ Idem

²⁶ Ibid, 725

²⁷ Ibid, 726

²⁸ Ibid, 727

²⁹ Ibid, 726

³⁰ The Liturgy of St. Chrysostom is given in translation in Richard and Painter, pp. 68-94. The Preface appears on page 84.

³¹ Idem

³² Painter and Richard, 242

³³ Reed provides the rubrics for the Brunswick service. They specify that the communicants should present themselves at the entrance to the chancel prior to the preface. If no communicants came forward the pastor was still to don his communion vestments and the service would conclude with the Preface, Sanctus, Lord’s Prayer and Benediction. Reed, *The Lutheran Liturgy*, p. 96