

## April:

### The Lord's Supper (Book of Concord, pp. 467-76)

Introduction By Paul R. Hinlicky, Tise Professor of Lutheran Studies, Roanoke College & Docent, Evanjelicka Bohoslovecka Fakulta, Univerzita Komenskeho, Bratislava, Slovakia.

The Lord's Supper is the sacrament of reunion with the community of Christ: the believers dispersed into the world assemble as the Body of Christ (I Corinthians 11:18) to partake of the Body of Christ in anticipation of His public manifestation to all (I Corinthians 11:26). In keeping with this teaching of Paul in 1 Corinthians, Luther accordingly affirms something more concrete than an effervescent "real presence." Presence means *being there*, somewhere in time and place. Whatever other kind of presence can there be than a real one? This *reality* Luther affirms. He affirms Christ's *bodily* presence. The Sacrament of the Altar is "the true body and blood, in and under bread and wine, for us to eat and drink."

Yet this bodily presence is not a "Capernaum" presence, "like sausage hanging in the butcher shop" (see John 6: 59-60). To talk about this paradoxical presence of Christ "born of the Virgin Mary and crucified under Pontius Pilate yet raised on the third day" before His public Parousia, Luther thinks with Paul, who can distinguish the glorified body of the risen Lord from flesh and blood which cannot inherit the kingdom of God (I Corinthians 15: 425-0). From this Pauline perspective, he can also accommodate the Johannine teaching that the "flesh" of Christ is food, indeed the living bread that comes down from heaven, since John 6 also rejects that "carnal" understanding of the "flesh" imagined by disciples from Capernaum who took offense and deserted Jesus at the "hard saying" about eating His "flesh" for salvation. Terminological or semantic differences should not obscure the unity of witness between John 6 and I Corinthians to the paradoxical presence of the very One who suckled at Mary's breast and died impaled on the Roman stake.

It is likely that the Apostolic Father, Ignatius of Antioch, had this schism in John 6 in mind when the disciples from Capernaum deserted Jesus at his "hard saying" about eating His "flesh" when he wrote to the Smyrneans around 110 AD:

*"Mark those who hold strange doctrine concerning the grace of Jesus Christ which came to us, how that they are contrary to the mind of God. They have no care for love, none for the widow, none for the orphan, none for the afflicted, none for the prisoner, nor the hungry or thirsty. They abstain from the eucharist and prayer, because they do not allow that the eucharist is the flesh of our Savior Jesus Christ, which flesh suffered for our sins, and which the Father in his goodness raised up."*

While it is unlikely that Luther knew this text, he would have loved it. For Luther too, unlike ordinary bread which we consume, metabolize and thus change into us, this food changes us into it. The anti-docetic stress on the personal identity of the risen, glorified and paradoxically present Christ with the body born of Mary that suffered under Pontius Pilate, moreover, is at the heart of Luther's *Christus pro nobis*, Christ-for-us, the only saving Christ as Ignatius also witnesses.

As with the Lord's Prayer, and Baptism, so also the Lord's Supper is grounded in the creative divine command, DO THIS, meaning not, "Do this whenever you happen to think about having communion," but rather, "This is how I want to be remembered, as the One who laid down His body and blood for you, once on Calvary, but also now, whenever you assemble as my Body in the world." The creative, divine command is, as we say today, *performative*. It is a performance, a speech-action which says what it gives and gives what it says, though only faith benefits from this performance of God's creative Word. In the Words of Institution faithfully spoken by the presiding minister, Christ Himself not only speaks but effects what it said, so that of all the bread in the world, this particular bread is singled out as the place of His body given for you and this particular cup of blessing the cup of His blood shed for you.

If this faith-nurturing Word of Christ who presents and imparts Himself today as the One who once for all suffered and died is what the Sacrament is, then the question of how it benefits almost answers itself. Christ does not so much offer benefits as Himself. The gift of Christ's innocent self-offering for us who are guilty secures and vouchsafes the forgiveness of real, not fictitious sinners. Here the barrier between the holy God and sinful humanity is breached by the interposition of Christ's body on the cross, so that sin disappears into forgiveness and all the treasures of God come gushing forth for life and salvation.

Like with prayer and baptism, the gifts do not depend on faith but are given for the sake of faith, so that God who gives can take hold of consciousness and organize anew the desires of the heart. So the new born creature of God is fed and fit for renewed battle against the sinful self, the hostile world and the uncanny devil, expected to progress forward in faith, hope and love. Faith is the understanding *appropriation* i.e. taking what is offered *pro me*, "for me," and making it my very own.

Following Paul, however, Luther sees that unfaithful and ignorant reception is possible – scandalously so. Such eating and drinking despises the body of Christ in that it "shows contempt for the church of God and humiliates those who have nothing" (I Corinthians 11: 23b). The cup of blessing thus can become a cup of poison when it is not received faithfully, for the purpose intended, with discernment and self-examination (I Corinthians 11: 30).

Note well: in this case, the Lord's Supper is not a nothing but a poison, not an empty and inefficacious sign but the thing signified working as curse and not the divinely intended blessing because the dear divine cost of the crucified and risen body of Christ for the holy communion of redeemed sinners is blasphemed by undiscerning, worldly partisanship (I Corinthians 11: 18). In the Lutheran theological tradition this warning about the *mandicatio indignorum*, the eating of the unworthy, not for blessing but for curse (I Corinthians 11: 28-32) has been regarded as a standard of doctrine. In principle, the Lord's Supper is meant for the evangelized, catechized and baptized people of God who in faith know what they are doing when by eating and drinking they are turned into the body of Christ.

Luther attends as well to the much botched question about the frequency of communion. I say, "botched," because the actual history in the West of how often a Christian should receive goes something like this. When the European peoples were converted to Christianity in mass by the

conversion of their warlords, the illiterate and uncatechized multitudes brought with them all sorts of non-Christian superstitions. Stealing the consecrated bread for magical use as talisman was commonplace. Spilling from the chalice or guzzling of wine took place too. After the cup was removed from the laity on the grounds that body and blood are interchangeable “elements,” so that Christ was said to be equally present in either, and after communion wafers were invented so that they would dissolve when placed upon the outstretched tongue (making it difficult to take the bread home for magical purposes), the question inevitably arose whether it was necessary to commune at all.

The ruling was that it was necessary to commune at least once a year, after private confession, during Holy Week, if one was to be counted a Christian. The celebration of the Eucharist on Sunday largely had become a spectator sport. The chief thing was witnessing the “hocus pocus” of the transubstantiation, the priest sacrificing the body of Christ to appease an angry God on behalf of the sinful masses gathered to witness the offering. “Hocus pocus” is a corruption of the Latin, *Hoc est corpus meum*, “This is my body.”

This was the “botched” practice Luther inherited. While he refuses to make a law about frequency of communion, he emphatically taught that communion is the gift of God for Christians in the struggle, and so he exhorted fervently that the gift be taken seriously and received gratefully. Yet it cannot be said that a full recovery of the patristic practice was achieved by Luther’s reforms.

He was so concerned with evangelizing and catechizing the common people that the church services practically turned into academic lectures. The vestments of the learned doctor replaced the regalia of the priesthood. Luther had advised reception at least four times a year, under his historical circumstances a fourfold increase in frequency. But this intended increase turned into a de facto limit. To this day in Europe, quarterly communion is the prevailing practice, offered for those who desire it after the congregation is dismissed from the preaching service. Even in professedly Lutheran churches, communion is not especially understood as the gospel Word of God, “This is my Body, given for you,” offered then as the particular way in which Christ commands that He be remembered amid His faithful. Only in recent years, thanks to the liturgical movement, has communion been restored as belonging to the normal shape of Christian assembly. But, one fears, even this renewal has more to do with belonging than believing.

For the historical Luther, it is the devil who hates the holy communion and so mocks mere bread and wine on the altar as nothing but bread and wine, just as it mocks the water of baptism as mere water, and the external word of preachers as mere opinion, and at bottom of all this the mere humanity of Jesus, born of Mary and suffered under Pontius Pilate, as nothing but another fool for God, denied, betrayed, abandoned and defeated once and for all. The devil, according to Luther, deceives by making such appearances appear as the whole story and the end of the story.

Jesus Christ – empty idol or icon of the living God? In either case, we deal with the same appearance (*persona*) in the world, just as the word, “This is my body,” asserts. “Take away such assertions,” Luther asserted against Erasmus, and “you take away Christianity!”

# The Sacrament of the Altar

By: Martin Luther

As we heard about Holy Baptism, so we must speak about the second sacrament in the same way, under three headings, stating what it is, what its benefits are, and who is to receive it. All this is established from the words Christ used to institute it. So everyone who wishes to be a Christian and to go to the sacrament should know them. For we do not intend to admit to the sacrament and administer it to those who do not know what they seek or why they come. The words are these:

“Our LORD Jesus Christ, on the night when he was betrayed, took the bread, gave thanks, and broke it, and gave it to his disciples and said, ‘Take, eat; this is my body, which is given for you. Do this in remembrance of me.’

“In the same way also he took the cup after supper, gave thanks, and gave it to them, and said, ‘Take, drink of this, all of you. This cup is the New Testament in my blood, which is poured out for you for the forgiveness of sins. Do this, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of me.’ ”

Here, too, we do not want to quarrel and dispute with those who despise and desecrate this sacrament. Instead, as in the case of baptism, we shall first learn what is of greatest importance, namely, that the chief thing is God’s Word and ordinance or command. It was not dreamed up or invented by some mere human being but was instituted by Christ without anyone’s counsel or deliberation. Therefore, just as the Ten Commandments, the Lord’s Prayer, and the Creed retain their nature and value even if you never keep, pray, or believe them, so also does this blessed sacrament remain unimpaired and inviolate even if we use and handle it unworthily. Do you think God cares so much about our faith and conduct that he would permit them to affect his ordinance? No, all temporal things remain as God has created and ordered them, regardless of how we treat them. This must always be emphasized, for thus we can thoroughly refute all the babbling of the seditious spirits who, contrary to the Word of God, regard the sacraments as something that we do.

Now, what is the Sacrament of the Altar? Answer: It is the true body and blood of the LORD Christ, in and under the bread and wine, which we Christians are commanded by Christ’s word to eat and drink. And just as we said of baptism that it is not mere water, so we say here, too, that the sacrament is bread and wine, but not mere bread and wine such as is served at the table. Rather, it is bread and wine set within God’s Word and bound to it.

It is the Word, I say, that makes this a sacrament and distinguishes it from ordinary bread and wine, so that it is called and truly is Christ’s body and blood. For it is said, “Accedat verbum ad elementum et fit sacramentum,” that is, “When the Word is joined to the external element, it becomes a sacrament.” This saying of St. Augustine is so appropriate and well put that he could hardly have said anything better. The Word must make the element a sacrament; otherwise, it remains an ordinary element. Now, this is not the word and ordinance of a prince or emperor, but of the divine Majesty at whose feet all creatures should kneel and confess that it is as he says, and they should accept it with all reverence, fear, and humility.

With this Word you can strengthen your conscience and declare: “Let a hundred thousand devils, with all the fanatics, come forward and say, ‘How can bread and wine be Christ’s body and

blood?’ etc. Still I know that all the spirits and scholars put together have less wisdom than the divine Majesty has in his littlest finger. Here is Christ’s word: ‘Take, eat, this is my body.’ ‘Drink of this, all of you, this is the New Testament in my blood,’ etc. Here we shall take our stand and see who dares to instruct Christ and alter what he has spoken. It is true, indeed, that if you take the Word away from the elements or view them apart from the Word, you have nothing but ordinary bread and wine. But if the words remain, as is right and necessary, then by virtue of them the elements are truly the body and blood of Christ. For as Christ’s lips speak and say, so it is; he cannot lie or deceive.”

Hence it is easy to answer all kinds of questions that now trouble people—for example, whether even a wicked priest can administer the sacrament, and similar questions. Our conclusion is: Even though a scoundrel receives or administers the sacrament, it is the true sacrament (that is, Christ’s body and blood), just as truly as when one uses it most worthily. For it is not founded on human holiness but on the Word of God. As no saint on earth, yes, no angel in heaven can make bread and wine into Christ’s body and blood, so likewise can no one change or alter the sacrament, even through misuse. For the Word by which it was constituted a sacrament is not rendered false because of an individual’s unworthiness or unbelief. Christ does not say, “If you believe or if you are worthy, you have my body and blood,” but rather, “Take, eat and drink, this is my body and blood.” Likewise, when he says, “Do this” (namely, what I now do, what I institute, what I give you and bid you take), this is as much as to say, “No matter whether you are worthy or unworthy, you have here his body and blood by the power of these words that are connected to the bread and wine.” Mark this and remember it well. For upon these words rest our whole argument, our protection and defense against all errors and deceptions that have ever arisen or may yet arise.

Thus we have briefly considered the first part, namely, the essence of this sacrament. Now we come also to its power and benefit, for which purpose the sacrament was really instituted. For it is most necessary that we know what we should seek and obtain there. This is clear and easily understood from the words just quoted: “This is my body and blood, given and poured out FOR YOU for the forgiveness of sins.” That is to say, in brief, that we go to the sacrament because there we receive a great treasure, through and in which we obtain the forgiveness of sins. Why? Because the words are there, and they impart it to us! For this reason he bids me eat and drink, that it may be mine and do me good as a sure pledge and sign—indeed, as the very gift he has provided for me against my sins, death, and all evils.

Therefore, it is appropriately called food of the soul, for it nourishes and strengthens the new creature. For in the first instance, we are born anew through baptism. However, our human flesh and blood, as I have said, have not lost their old skin. There are so many hindrances and attacks of the devil and the world that we often grow weary and faint and at times even stumble.

Therefore the Lord’s Supper is given as a daily food and sustenance so that our faith may be refreshed and strengthened and that it may not succumb in the struggle but become stronger and stronger. For the new life should be one that continually develops and progresses. But it has to suffer a great deal of opposition. The devil is a furious enemy; when he sees that we resist him and attack the old creature, and when he cannot rout us by force, he sneaks and skulks about at every turn, trying all kinds of tricks, and does not stop until he has finally worn us out so that we either renounce our faith or lose heart and become indifferent or impatient. For times like these, when

our heart feels too sorely pressed, this comfort of the Lord's Supper is given to bring us new strength and refreshment.

Here again our clever spirits contort themselves with their great learning and wisdom; they rant and rave, "How can bread and wine forgive sins or strengthen faith?" Yet they have heard and know that we do not claim this of bread and wine—for in itself bread is bread—but of that bread and wine that are Christ's body and blood and that are accompanied by the Word. These and no other, we say, are the treasure through which such forgiveness is obtained. This treasure is conveyed and communicated to us in no other way than through the words "given and shed for you." Here you have both—that it is Christ's body and blood and that they are yours as a treasure and gift. Christ's body cannot be an unfruitful, useless thing that does nothing and helps no one. Yet, however great the treasure may be in itself, it must be set within the Word and offered to us through the Word, otherwise we could never know of it or seek it.

Therefore it is absurd for them to say that Christ's body and blood are not given and poured out for us in the Lord's Supper and hence that we cannot have forgiveness of sins in the sacrament. Although the work took place on the cross and forgiveness of sins has been acquired, yet it cannot come to us in any other way than through the Word. How should we know that this took place or was to be given to us if it were not proclaimed by preaching, by the oral Word? From what source do they know of forgiveness, and how can they grasp and appropriate it, except by steadfastly believing the Scriptures and the gospel? Now, the whole gospel and the article of the Creed, "I believe in one holy Christian church . . . the forgiveness of sins," are embodied in this sacrament and offered to us through the Word. Why, then, should we allow such a treasure to be torn out of the sacrament? They must still confess that these are the very words that we hear everywhere in the gospel. They can no more say that these words in the sacrament are of no value than they can dare to say that the whole gospel or Word of God apart from the sacrament is of no value.

So far we have treated the whole sacrament from the standpoint both of what it is in itself and of what it brings and benefits. Now we must also consider who the person is who receives such power and benefit. Briefly, as we said above about baptism and in many other places, the answer is: It is the one who believes what the words say and what they give, for they are not spoken or preached to stone and wood but to those who hear them, those to whom he says, "Take and eat," etc. And because he offers and promises forgiveness of sins, it can be received in no other way than by faith. This faith he himself demands in the Word when he says, "given FOR YOU" and "shed FOR YOU," as if he said, "This is why I give it and bid you eat and drink, that you may take it as your own and enjoy it." All those who let these words be addressed to them and believe that they are true have what the words declare. But those who do not believe have nothing, for they let this gracious blessing be offered to them in vain and refuse to enjoy it. The treasure is opened and placed at everyone's door, yes, upon the table, but it is also your responsibility to take it and confidently believe that it is just as the words tell you.

Now this is the sum total of a Christian's preparation to receive this sacrament worthily. Because this treasure is fully offered in the words, it can be grasped and appropriated only by the heart. Such a gift and eternal treasure cannot be seized with the hand. Fasting, prayer, and the like may have their place as an external preparation and children's exercise so that one's body may behave properly and reverently toward the body and blood of Christ. But the body cannot grasp

and appropriate what is given in and with the sacrament. This is done by the faith of the heart that discerns and desires such a treasure.

This is enough on this sacrament, as far as is necessary for general teaching purposes. What else there is to say about it belongs at a different time.

In conclusion, now that we have the right interpretation and teaching concerning the sacrament, there is also great need to admonish and encourage us so that we do not let this great a treasure, which is daily administered and distributed among Christians, pass by to no purpose. What I mean is that those who want to be Christians should prepare themselves to receive this blessed sacrament frequently. For we see that people are becoming lax and lazy about its observance. A great number of people who hear the gospel, now that the pope's nonsense has been abolished and we are freed from his compulsion and commands, let a year, or two, three, or more years go by without receiving the sacrament, as if they were such strong Christians that they have no need of it. Others let themselves be kept and deterred from it because we have taught that none should go unless they feel a hunger and thirst impelling them to it. Still others pretend that it is a matter of liberty, not of necessity, and that it is enough if they simply believe. Thus the great majority go so far that they become quite barbarous and ultimately despise both the sacrament and God's Word.

Now it is true, as we have said, that no one under any circumstances should be forced or compelled, lest we institute a new slaughter of souls. Nevertheless, it must be understood that such people who abstain and absent themselves from the sacrament over a long period of time are not to be considered Christians. For Christ did not institute the sacrament for us to treat it as a spectacle, but he commanded his Christians to eat and drink it and thereby remember him.

Indeed, true Christians who cherish and honor the sacrament should of their own accord urge and constrain themselves to go. However, in order that the simple people and the weak, who would also like to be Christians, may be induced to see the reason and the need for receiving the sacrament, we shall talk a little about this. As in other matters that have to do with faith, love, and patience, it is not enough just to teach and to instruct, but there must also be daily exhortation, so that on this subject we must be persistent in preaching, lest people become indifferent and bored. For we know and feel how the devil always sets himself against this and every other Christian activity, hounding and driving people from it as much as he can.

In the first place, we have a clear text in the very words of Christ, "DO THIS in remembrance of me." These are words that instruct and command us, urging all those who want to be Christians to partake of the sacrament. Therefore, whoever wants to be a disciple of Christ—it is those to whom he is speaking here—must faithfully hold to this sacrament, not from compulsion, forced by humans, but to obey and please the Lord Christ. However, you may say, "But the words are added, 'as often as you do it'; so he compels no one, but leaves it to our free choice."

Answer: That is true, but it does not say that we should never partake of it. Indeed, precisely his words, "as often as you do it," imply that we should do it frequently. And they are added because he wishes the sacrament to be free, not bound to a special time like the Passover, which the Jews were obligated to eat only once a year, precisely on the evening of the fourteenth day of the first full moon, without variation of a single day. He means to say: "I am instituting a Passover

or Supper for you, which you shall enjoy not just on this one evening of the year, but frequently, whenever and wherever you will, according to everyone's opportunity and need, being bound to no special place or time" (although the pope afterward perverted it and turned it back into a Jewish feast).

Thus you see that we are not granted liberty to despise the sacrament. For I call it despising when people, with nothing to hinder them, let a long time elapse without ever desiring the sacrament. If you want such liberty, you may just as well take the further liberty not to be a Christian; then you need not believe or pray, for the one is just as much Christ's commandment as the other. But if you want to be a Christian, you must from time to time satisfy and obey this commandment. For such a commandment should always move you to examine yourself and think: "See, what sort of Christian am I? If I were one, I would surely have at least a little desire to do what my Lord has commanded me to do."

Indeed, because we show such an aversion toward the sacrament, people can easily sense what sort of Christians we were under the papacy when we went to the sacrament purely from compulsion and fear of human commandments, without joy and love and even without regard for Christ's commandment. But we neither force nor compel anyone, nor need anyone do so in order to serve or please us. What should move and induce you is that he desires it, and it pleases him. You should not let yourself be forced by human beings either to faith or to any good work. All we are doing is to urge you to do what you ought to do, not for our sake but for your own. He invites and incites you, and if you want to show contempt for his sacrament, you must answer for it yourself.

This is the first point, especially for the benefit of the cold and indifferent, that they may come to their senses and wake up. It is certainly true, as I have found in my own experience, and as everyone will find in his or her own case, that if a person stays away from the sacrament, day by day he or she will become more and more callous and cold and will eventually spurn it altogether. To avoid this, we must examine our heart and conscience and act like a person who really desires to be right with God. The more we do this, the more our heart will be warmed and kindled, and it will not grow entirely cold.

But suppose you say, "What if I feel that I am unfit?" Answer: This is my struggle as well, especially inherited from the old order under the pope when we tortured ourselves to become so perfectly pure that God might not find the least blemish in us. Because of this we became so timid that everyone was thrown into consternation, saying, "Alas, you are not worthy!" Then nature and reason begin to contrast our unworthiness with this great and precious blessing, and it appears like a dark lantern in contrast to the bright sun, or as manure in contrast to jewels; then because they see this, such people will not go to the sacrament and wait until they are prepared, until one week passes into another and one half-year into yet another. If you choose to fix your eye on how good and pure you are, to wait until nothing torments you, you will never go.

For this reason we must make a distinction here among people. Those who are impudent and unruly ought to be told to stay away, for they are not ready to receive the forgiveness of sins because they do not desire it and do not want to be righteous. The others, however, who are not so callous and dissolute but would like to be good, should not absent themselves, even though in other



respects they are weak and frail. As St. Hilary has also said, “Unless a person has committed such a sin that he has to be expelled from the congregation and has forfeited the name of Christian, he should not exclude himself from the sacrament,” lest he deprive himself of life. People never get to the point that they do not retain many common infirmities in their flesh and blood.

People with such misgivings must learn that it is the highest art to realize that this sacrament does not depend upon our worthiness. For we are not baptized because we are worthy and holy, nor do we come to confession as if we were pure and without sin; on the contrary, we come as poor, miserable people, precisely because we are unworthy. The only exception would be the person who desires no grace and absolution and has no intention of improving.

But those who earnestly desire grace and comfort should compel themselves to go and allow no one to deter them, saying, “I would really like to be worthy, but I come not on account of any worthiness of mine, but on account of your Word, because you have commanded it and I want to be your disciple, regardless of my worthiness.” This is difficult, however, for we always have this obstacle and hindrance to contend with, that we concentrate more upon ourselves than upon the words that come from Christ’s lips. Nature would like to act in such a way that it may rest and rely firmly upon itself; otherwise it refuses to take a step. Let this suffice for the first point.

In the second place, a promise is attached to the commandment, as we heard above, which should most powerfully draw and impel us. Here stand the gracious and lovely words, “This is my body, given FOR YOU,” “This is my blood, shed FOR YOU for the forgiveness of sins.” These words, as I have said, are not preached to wood or stone but to you and me; otherwise he might just as well have kept quiet and not instituted a sacrament. Ponder, then, and include yourself personally in the “YOU” so that he may not speak to you in vain.

For in this sacrament he offers us all the treasures he brought from heaven for us, to which he most graciously invites us in other places, as when he says in Matthew 11[:28\*]: “Come to me, all you that are weary and are carrying heavy burdens, and I will give you rest.” Surely it is a sin and a shame that, when he so tenderly and faithfully summons and exhorts us for our highest and greatest good, we regard it with such disdain, neglecting it so long that we grow quite cold and callous and lose all desire and love for it. We must never regard the sacrament as a harmful thing from which we should flee, but as a pure, wholesome, soothing medicine that aids you and gives life in both soul and body. For where the soul is healed, the body is helped as well. Why, then, do we act as if the sacrament were a poison that would kill us if we ate of it?

Of course, it is true that those who despise the sacrament and lead unchristian lives receive it to their harm and damnation. To such people nothing can be good or wholesome, just as when a sick person willfully eats and drinks what is forbidden by the physician. But those who feel their weakness, who are anxious to be rid of it and desire help, should regard and use the sacrament as a precious antidote against the poison in their systems. For here in the sacrament you are to receive from Christ’s lips the forgiveness of sins, which contains and brings with it God’s grace and Spirit with all his gifts, protection, defense, and power against death, the devil, and every trouble.

Thus you have on God’s part both the commandment and the promise of the Lord Christ. Meanwhile, on your part, you ought to be induced by your own need, which hangs around your

neck and which is the very reason for this command, invitation, and promise. For he himself says [Matt. 9:12\*], “Those who are well have no need of a physician, but those who are sick,” that is, those who labor and are burdened with sin, fear of death, and the attacks of the flesh and the devil. If you are burdened and feel your weakness, go joyfully to the sacrament and let yourself be refreshed, comforted, and strengthened. For if you wait until you are rid of your burden in order to come to the sacrament purely and worthily, you will have to stay away from it forever. In such a case he pronounces the verdict, “If you are pure and upright, you have no need of me and I also have no need of you.” Therefore the only ones who are unworthy are those who do not feel their burdens nor admit to being sinners.

Suppose you say, “What shall I do if I cannot feel this need or if I do not experience hunger and thirst for the sacrament?” Answer: For those in such a state of mind that they cannot feel it, I know no better advice than that they put their hands to their bosom to determine whether they are made of flesh and blood. If you find that you are, then for your own good turn to St. Paul’s Epistle to the Galatians and hear what are the fruits of your flesh: “Now the works of the flesh (he says) are obvious: adultery, fornication, impurity, licentiousness, idolatry, sorcery, enmity, strife, jealousy, anger, quarrels, dissensions, factions, envy, murder, drunkenness, carousing, and things like these.”

For this reason, if you cannot feel the need, at least believe the Scriptures. They will not lie to you, since they know your flesh better than you yourself do. Yes, and St. Paul concludes in Romans 7[:18\*], “For I know that nothing good dwells within me, that is, in my flesh.” If St. Paul speaks this way of his own flesh, let us not wish to be better or holier. But the fact that we do not feel it is all the worse, for it is a sign that ours is a leprous flesh, which feels nothing although it rages with disease and gnaws away at itself. As we have said, even if you are so utterly dead in sin, at least believe the Scriptures, which pronounce this judgment upon you. In short, the less you feel your sins and infirmities, the more reason you have to go to the sacrament and seek its help and remedy.

Again, look around you and see whether you are also in the world. If you do not know, ask your neighbors about it. If you are in the world, do not think that there will be any lack of sins and needs. Just begin to act as if you want to become upright and cling to the gospel, and see whether you will not acquire enemies who harm, wrong, and injure you and give you cause to sin and do wrong. If you have not experienced this, then take it from the Scriptures, which everywhere give this testimony about the world.

Moreover, you will surely have the devil around you, too. You will not entirely trample him underfoot because our Lord Christ could not entirely avoid him. Now, what is the devil? Nothing else than what the Scriptures call him: a liar and a murderer. A liar who entices the heart away from God’s Word and blinds it, making you unable to feel your need or to come to Christ. A murderer who begrudges you every hour of your life. If you could see how many daggers, spears, and arrows are aimed at you every moment, you would be glad to come to the sacrament as often as you can. The only reason we go about so securely and heedlessly is that we neither imagine nor believe that we are in the flesh, in the wicked world, or under the kingdom of the devil.

Try this, therefore, and practice it well. Just examine yourself, or look around a little, and cling only to the Scriptures. If even then you still feel nothing, you have all the more need to lament both to God and to your brother or sister. Take the advice of others and ask them to pray for you: never give up until the stone is removed from your heart. Then your need will become apparent, and you will perceive that you have sunk twice as low as any other poor sinner and are desperately in need of the sacrament to combat your misery. This misery, unfortunately, you do not see, unless God grants his grace so that you may become more sensitive to it and hungrier for the sacrament. This happens especially because the devil besieges you and continually lies in wait to trap and destroy you, soul and body, so that you cannot be safe from him for even one hour. How suddenly can he bring you into misery and distress when you least expect it!

Let this serve as an exhortation, then, not only for us who are old and advanced in years, but also for the young people who must be brought up in Christian teaching and in a right understanding of it. With such training we may more easily instill the Ten Commandments, the Creed, and the Lord's Prayer into the young so that they will receive them with joy and earnestness, practice them from their youth, and become accustomed to them. For it is completely useless to try to change old people. We cannot perpetuate these and other teachings unless we train the people who come after us and succeed us in our office and work, so that they in turn may bring up their children successfully. In this way God's Word and a Christian community will be preserved. Therefore let all heads of a household remember that it is their duty, by God's injunction and command, to teach their children or have them taught the things they ought to know. Because they have been baptized and received into the people of Christ, they should also enjoy this fellowship of the sacrament so that they may serve us and be useful. For they must all help us to believe, to love, to pray, and to fight against the devil.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Kolb, R., Wengert, T. J., & Arand, C. P. (2000). *The Book of Concord: the confessions of the Evangelical Lutheran Church* (pp. 467–476). Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press.