

We focus our hearts tonight on the first letter of Paul to the Corinthians, chapter eleven, verses twenty-three to twenty-eight. We read, "For I received from the Lord what I also delivered to you: The Lord Jesus, on the night when he was betrayed, took bread, and when he had given thanks, he broke it and said, "This is my body, which is for you. Do this in remembrance of me." In the same way, after the meal, he also took the cup, saying, "This cup is the new testament in my blood. Do this, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of me." For as often as you eat this bread and drink the cup, you proclaim the Lord's death until he comes. Therefore whoever eats the bread or drinks the cup of the Lord in an unworthy manner will be guilty of sinning against the Lord's body and blood. Instead, let a person examine himself and after doing so, let him eat of the bread and drink from the cup." This is the Word of our Lord. Let us pray. Lord Jesus, bring us to your table that we might rightly receive your Supper. Amen. Dear brothers and sisters, fellow partakers of the body and blood of Christ,

Christmas is long past. Hopefully your Christmas tree is stored away in its box or being recycled to better the environment. You are probably getting good use out of some of your gifts, too. Once Christmas is over, most people don't think about gifts much during the year. At certain special times in life, we give gifts. When you get confirmed at church, graduate from high school or college, get married, have your first child or celebrate a birthday, you get gifts. But not all gift giving occasions are joyful. Heirs receive a gift when a loved one dies and leaves them a bequest. Tonight, we remember our status as heirs of the kingdom of Christ. But the gift we receive from our Lord just hours before his death is not money or property or shares of stock. From the hand of our Lord tonight we get the most valuable gift he can offer: himself. **Receive your Lord remembering his love for you and rejoicing in his forgiveness!**

Receive your Lord remembering his love for you! Most people claim the focus of Maundy Thursday should be somewhere other than on the Sacrament of Holy Communion. The word Maundy comes from the Latin word *mandatum*, or command. These people say Maundy Thursday receives its name from the command Jesus gave his disciples in the upper room to "Love one another." But that would be a mistake. Jesus' most important words to his disciples tonight are not the command to love. They concern the ultimate expression of that love. Jesus did not give that expression by washing the feet of his disciples. He gave it by offering them the Lord's Supper. His commands to us there, in the familiar words of institution we all know, are the commands through which we remember his love tonight.

Truly remembering Jesus' love for us means being in the right frame of mind as we prepare for, receive, and return from the Lord's Table each time we come to Communion. How often have you gone through the motions on a Communion Sunday without ever giving a second thought to where you are, what you are receiving, and what this means for your life? It can be easy to do, even for pastors. Our minds can wander to what we are doing after church that day, the argument we had last night or the things we need to get done tomorrow. How about how often we receive this blessed meal? If you took Communion last week, do you feel no need for it this week? Ask yourself, have I sinned since last Sunday? If you answer yes, you need the blessings Jesus offers you at the Lord's Table.

When you approach this altar to receive the sacrament tonight, remember Jesus' love for you! Meditate on where you are going: into the presence of God himself to receive Christ himself into your hearts in a way incomprehensible to our human reason. When you receive Holy Communion, Christ Jesus himself comes to you in, with and under the bread and wine. Jesus gives you his love tonight in this special way. He assures you he means you individually when he says your sins are forgiven. Listen to his words. "This is my body, which is for you; do this in remembrance of me. This cup is the new covenant in my blood; do this, whenever you drink it, in remembrance of me." Jesus shows you the fullest measure of his love for you in this meal in the same way he does tomorrow. Your Lord gives and pours out his very life and self to you with the bread and wine just as he gave his life on Good Friday. All of this has the same purpose: loving you and bringing to you the love of God to share with others.

Did you know you could preach a sermon? You can, and you do. Each time you come forward to receive Holy Communion, you preach a sermon to two different audiences. First, you preach to yourself. You say to yourself, "I am a sinner. I need forgiveness. Jesus offers me his body and blood today to assure me my sins are forgiven. I will leave his table with new resolve in my heart to leave my sins behind and walk with him in my new Christian life." Then you preach to all those who receive the Supper with you. "I believe the same things you do." By so doing you encourage them in their own Christian lives.

Brothers and sisters, leave the sacrament tonight refreshed and restored to live what you preach. Share the love of Jesus shown to you to the world. Now comes imitating the love of Jesus displayed in his washing of the disciples' feet. Go out, strengthened by this Holy Supper, to show Christ-like servant love to everyone you can as God gives you opportunity. Remember the love of Jesus to you by sharing his love with others.

Most of the time, children don't cry at Christmas or on their birthdays when they receive gifts. Getting presents generally makes people happy. Yet our services today and tomorrow don't exactly overflow with happiness and joy the way they will Sunday morning. What is there to be happy about today? In a few minutes, we receive the feast of victory which assures us the events of Holy Week were not for nothing! Salvation is sure! Forgiveness and eternal life belong to us personally through Jesus! Come tonight to **receive your Lord rejoicing in his forgiveness!**

Before his betrayal by Judas Iscariot later in the evening, Jesus gave the other disciples his last will and testament. He did so by bringing out from the Passover meal the new sacrament of Holy Communion. In it, Jesus "handed over" his body and blood to the disciples with the bread and wine. He had only one purpose for doing this: making personal the forgiveness of his cross to the specific hurts of their hearts. Paul wanted us to know just how important Holy Communion is. "For I received from the Lord what I also passed on to you: The Lord Jesus, on the night he was betrayed..."

Why do we come to the table to receive our Lord this way? Maybe the better question is, what do we bring to the table? We bring filth. We bring shame. We bring guilt. We bring our sins. Hopefully, we don't come just because it is what we always do. Hopefully, we don't come up here like sheep being herded with no thought about what this is or why we need it. God forbid we come up here with intentions of leaving here to go back to a life of sin. If we do, Paul has stern words of warning for us. "Therefore, whoever eats the bread or drinks the cup of the Lord in an unworthy manner will be guilty of sinning against the body and blood of the Lord."

How do we keep ourselves from such a grievous sin? "A person ought to examine himself or herself before they eat of the bread and drink of the cup." Take an honest sincere look at your heart. Ask yourself, "Do I know my sins? Do they bother me? Do I honestly want to get rid of them and change my life?" If you answer yes to those questions, the sacrament is meant for you. Do you feel beyond help in your sins? Receive the body and blood of the Lord for your forgiveness. Recognize your sins in your heart. Repent of them. Beg for forgiveness from Jesus and find it waiting for you in the Sacrament of the Altar. Come to the table of your Savior hungering and thirsting for righteousness. Come and find the perfect fit for the holes sin has pierced in your heart in your Savior Jesus.

Leave the table rejoicing in your forgiveness. Be certain the forgiveness of Jesus is yours. Jesus gave his life for you the day after he gave you this meal. The forgiveness in it is guaranteed to you by him. Receive the Sacrament tonight with joy. Come to the table sorrowing over your sins. But leave it rejoicing in your forgiveness. Come to the table full of guilt. Leave it with a clean conscience. Come to the table weakened by the attacks of sin. Leave it strong in the grace and peace of your Lord Jesus. Come to this altar tonight with your sins. Leave with nothing but the love of Jesus and Jesus himself in your heart. Receive in this bread and wine the true body and blood of your Lord Jesus. Receive in this Holy Communion the joy of your forgiveness and the peace of everlasting life with Jesus in heaven. Amen.

Now may the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ and his forgiveness impress on you the blessed nature of the sacrament. Amen.

Now, that our hearts might be prepared for the special presence of the Lord Jesus we are about to receive, let us examine ourselves using the personal preparation for Holy Communion found on page one hundred fifty-six in the front of the hymnal. I will read the questions and we will read the answers together. Then I will read the prayer at the end.