

ALL BECOME ONE CAKE

A Sermon on the Lord's Supper

by Martin Luther

Maundy Thursday, 1523

Translated, and with a preface

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PREFACE

Luther's preaching on the Lord's Supper has profound implications for the church's corporate life of mercy. His consummate treatment of the Sacrament and its meaning for the church's diakonic life may be read in his magisterial treatise of 1519, "The Blessed Sacrament of the Holy and True Body of Christ, and the Brotherhoods" (LW 35).

This booklet contains a more brief treatment preached on Maundy Thursday, 1523. Half of the sermon deals with Luther's plaint that belief in the presence of Christ's body and blood in the Sacrament, in and of itself, is of no benefit when the reception of the sacrament is turned into a work. The Gospel in the Sacrament is that Christ's body and blood are there given for the forgiveness of sins.

I value this sermon highly—and offer this humble translation—because of Luther's emphasis on the corporate and ethical ramifications of the congregation celebrating the Sacrament. Spurred on by St. Paul in I Cor. 10:15-17, and similar to the *Didache*, Luther preached,

The Holy Sacrament produces two things: one is that it makes us brothers and fellow heirs of the Lord Christ, such that it makes us one cake with him; the other that we also become common and one with all other people upon earth and also all become one cake. These two benefits Paul emphasized in I Corinthians 10.

Further...

I give myself for the common good and serve you and you make use of what is mine of which you are in need. Thus I am your food, just as you make use of bread when you are hungry that in turn your body may help and give strength to the one who is hungry. Therefore when I help and serve you in all need, I am your bread.

In "one cake,"

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St. Louis
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A SERMON ON MAUNDY THURSDAY¹

You dear people have often heard before how one is to be prepared at this time to receive the blessed sacrament of the body and blood of Christ. But because this day is ordered to the end that we receive the sacrament, we are compelled once again to speak of it, so long as there is need to do so. For I am certain that there are some here who are still in need of instruction. But I maintain, however, that it cannot be better comprehended and understood than if the misuse of the Sacrament is compared with the proper and Christian use, which Christ instituted.

First, up to now, it has been taught that one should be confident and firmly believe that under the bread is the true body and under the wine the true blood of Christ. This is the first part, which has been asserted above all else. When this point had been drilled into the people it was believed that the matter of the Sacrament had been very well preached. Then people were asked if they desired the Sacrament, and if so, then it was freely given to them with no further questions.

That was it, regarding the two parts of the Sacrament: a person believed [Christ's body and blood are present] and desired the Sacrament. On just why a person should desire it, or what more belongs to the matter, no one agreed. Nor has it been recognized that the devil and all non-Christians have such "faith." A person is quite ready to say that he believes this article of faith. For I can believe that Christ is risen from the dead, likewise that He passed through the stone placed at the entrance to the grave, and that He made no opening by which to leave the tomb. And I can also believe that He passed through closed doors, that when He did so He did not break or destroy anything. I can believe that wood and His body occupied one and the same space, and yet true flesh and blood were there. And so I can indeed also believe that in the bread and wine are the body and blood of Christ.

But it is still quite an insignificant thing should a person let it go at that, and only believe what he has understood up to this point, thinking he has got it all down pat. Such faith and desire are not at all sufficient for the Sacrament. All those who know nothing more of the Sacrament, and don't have a higher faith and desire for it, should not receive it. For giving

the Holy Sacrament to these people is not much different from shoving it down a pig's throat. It is a mockery and a dishonor of the Sacrament therefore to think that you will become something else, or not die. I will let it happen once more this year that anyone come [to the Sacrament] according to his own devotion. But after that we must mandate that one allow no one to go to the Sacrament unless he be asked beforehand and it be found out how his heart stands, whether he also knows what it is and why he goes.

It will have to suffice for us yet once more to look through our fingers and let the old misuse go. But so that the Sacrament may be further urged in the world, we must now get to the heart of the matter and improve what needs improvement.

So one should proceed in this matter as one deals with a child or someone else who needs to be instructed. When he is brought to the Sacrament of Baptism, it is not enough that he believes that this is Baptism and a sacrament instituted by God. Nor is it enough that one press him about whether or not he wants to be baptized, what sin he has committed recently, etc. But first he is asked, "Do you forsake the devil and all his works and ways?" There the one who baptizes presses him to find out whether he has and understands a genuine faith, what he seeks, and why he is present, and to what end he is going to use the Sacrament [of Baptism]. Much more so then shall one hear whether he is such a vessel [prepared to receive the Sacrament], so that he understands that one does not shove the body and blood of Christ into the mouth of an unclean beast. For those who go with only that kind of faith, reflect no further on it, simply take the Sacrament, view it as a work, and then think that this suffices. And they receive the Sacrament merely because it is instituted and in use, and one ought do it. It is like asking someone why he allows himself to be baptized and he answers, "I don't know. It was instituted, so I'll do it too. I think it's a good work."

Now, a person cannot slander and disgrace the Blessed Sacrament in any worse fashion than by viewing it merely as a good work. You see, a good work is something I can do for someone else, and so it is my work. The Sacrament is not mine, it is God's work. In the Sacrament I only allow myself to be served and to receive God's good gifts. Therefore, as far distant as God's works are from my works, so one must also separate and hold this sacrament as God's work, from our work. So it is now evident

that it is a great affront to the Sacrament, and blasphemy against God, when you maintain that it is not God's work.

One should ask when someone wants to come to the Sacrament, "First, what is this sacrament?" There he should answer, "The Sacrament is the word which Christ spoke at the supper, 'Take and eat. This is my body, which is given for you. This is my blood which is poured out for you, for the forgiveness of sin.' Accordingly, He has established along with the words, that bread and wine, under which are His flesh and blood [Fleysch und Blut], are the sign and seal that the words are true."

Then he should ask further, "What is the benefit of these words which Christ there speaks and upon which He hangs a sign?" Answer, "They are beneficial to this end that I should believe them, not that I therein should do a good work, but that my faith and heart trust them and not doubt that it is also as the words sound." How do these words sound? Thus, 'This is My body which is given for you,' which words he says to all who receive this sacrament. Therefore you must cling to the same word in faith and thus say, 'For this reason I come and desire the Sacrament, that I believe His body is given for me, His blood poured out for me, so that thereby my faith will be strengthened. For this reason will I receive this sign.' Whoever cannot do or believe this, should not be present for the Sacrament. For where such faith is not in the heart, all is lost.

Now do you see how far different that faith is from this faith? For if you merely believe that the Sacrament is the flesh and blood of Christ, what good is that to you and what use is it for you? The devil also believes this, but what good is it for him? Here you don't do anything more than a work and taste nothing more than the monstrance in which it is placed, or a cloth upon which is laid. For you are not a vessel that is made so that the sacrament be displayed in you as though you were a monstrance.

But when faith, which grabs hold of the word, comes and says, "Christ has spoken the word and I believe that it is true. I'll die trusting that word and I am certain and sure that He is there, that He is given to me and is mine. Thus I receive what is His, as though it were my own good, which God has freely given me," that is very powerful and quite different from that faith which believes He gives you nothing. This [genuine] faith however, gives you and brings to you all the treasure of which the word speaks,

as you believe. Therefore I wanted to say this to you and to spare you this [misuse of the Sacrament]. But from this point on it is necessary to give no one the Sacrament unless it is known how he believes, and that he is such a vessel that can lay hold of it, and that he knows how to declare what he believes.

It is also very necessary to do this for another reason: the Sacrament was externally instituted that one confess and testify to the faith, and that he do so publicly before the world. Before God it is enough in this matter that we believe the Gospel. Now, however, He wants us on earth to serve others and confess the faith, which we have in the heart. We do this with certain signs, which are Baptism and this Sacrament. With the mouth we must confess the Gospel and then claim the Sacrament as a testimony that we are Christians. Furthermore, I am certain for my person that I have a gracious God and I have also done enough before the world [to confess this fact]. Now, if you do not [make this confession], what do you make of the Sacrament? What will you do when you face death and the cross? What will you do when death comes and you must die, and the devil afflicts you? If you then say, "Yes, I believe that I have received the Sacrament. I believe that it is the true flesh and blood of Christ," the devil will retort, "Yes. I believe that too!" Thus your faith does not help you at all. The devil has conquered you and will march you off to a place where you can never be helped.

Rather you should say, therefore, "Behold! You tyrant, devil and death! I have received the Sacrament in which my Lord Christ, through His word, speaks to me and consoles me. He tells me that His body and blood are mine! I believe not only as much as you do, that it is His flesh and blood. I also believe that everything that the words say and carry, is a gift to me. Therefore I set this faith against you and all misfortune. I stand fast upon the words which will not lie to me, for they are God's word and testimony." When you die you will be propped up and at that moment neither I, nor any man will be able to help you, even if all priests should stand next to you with the Sacrament. That is what was done until now. They made and intended of the Sacrament nothing but a work. Indeed! As though that would help!

We read in the Books of the Kings in I Kings 4 [I Sam. 4:3] where the children of Israel fought against the Philistines and they were killed and put to flight. The elders of Israel said to the people,

“The reason God has allowed us to be defeated is because we do not have the ark of the Lord with us.”²

Was the ark still there? There God was, as in the Sacrament. Why then would He not help them? This is the reason. They too had made a work out of it. They relied upon that work and did not have faith. Therefore God punished them and they were more horribly struck down than before. We do the same, proceeding without faith, relying only upon the work of having received the Sacrament. So also when the devil comes to strike us he will slay us much worse than before.

To be sure, I know that this misuse, unfortunately, has a deep hold. Therefore we must drive home this matter with resolution, so that we remove this error, and strike with terror those who think that it is enough that one believe that in the Sacrament the body and blood of Christ are there. It is true, the food is indeed there, but you eat and partake of it not. For you partake when you believe that it is a gift for you, as we have said. Christ does not say, “Behold! There it is! There it lies!” He rather says, “Take it. I shall be yours.” He is not in the Sacrament merely so that we may lay hold of Him. He is there so that we make use of what is His. Thus there is no correct use other than that you believe that the body is given for you and the blood is poured out for you. And so you have it as you believe. Now if your conscience deceives you and says, “You have sinned thus and so! If only you were free [of this guilt]!” then go back to the Sacrament and say, “I have sinned. But the body [of Christ] has not sinned, and is guiltless. The body is there, given for me, and the blood is shed for me for the forgiveness of sin. This I believe, and to prove it I will receive the Sacrament.” When you do this your sin is taken away, and no misfortune can harm you any longer. For who can do anything to me now? Every mouth must be stopped and rendered dumb despite the devil and all misfortune. I am now one cake with Christ, so that no suffering can assail me again. I have won.

Now this is necessary for each and every Christian to know, so that he too can recount it and know when he is asked, why he receives the Sacrament. Therefore I say it once more so that you may be warned about this matter if you still desire to go. I will allow it, and bear your weakness. But henceforth it shall not remain so. He who desires to receive the Sacrament will be asked beforehand what the Sacrament is, and what he seeks there, so

that he can answer as we have demonstrated above. First, that the word of Christ and the sign of the body and blood of Christ is the Sacrament. Second, that he therein seek to strengthen his faith and console his conscience so that we come out of ourselves and to Christ. Thus you must be prepared in this matter so that you know how you shall make use of the Sacrament. If you cannot do this, then you shall not be given the Sacrament.

Along with this see to it that you do not feign a false faith when you at the same time believe that there Christ is given to you and is yours, and that this faith is merely a human thought which is your own doing. If this is the case, do not partake of this sacrament. For it must be a faith which God produces. You must know and perceive that God works such faith in you, that you believe, without doubt, that it is true, that this word and sign is given you, and you are so brave as to think that you would die for this sacrament. And if you still flounder and doubt, kneel down and plead that God grant you His grace so that you thus drive away such doubts and come to upright faith. There you will see how few Christians there are who would then gladly go to the Sacrament. However, if you could set it up and bring it about, I would desire that those who believe could also find a place to gather. I would already have loved to do this, but it has not been possible. For it has not been preached or emphasized enough. And Christ also preached to all, as did the apostles after Him, so that all have heard, believers and unbelievers, and whoever caught hold of it caught hold of it. We must also do the same. But one shall not cast the Sacrament among the people in a heap as the pope has done. When I preach the Gospel I do not know if it hits home. Here however I maintain that it has been believed by those who come to the Sacrament. I must not cast it in doubt, but rather be certain that the one to whom I give the Sacrament has understood the Gospel and truly believes. It is similar to Baptism, where, if I should baptize one, like the one who receives it, I shall not doubt it. But one should not cast the Sacrament among the people in a mob as the pope has done. When I preach the Gospel I do not know whom it strikes. Here however, I maintain that it has indeed struck the one who comes to the sacrament. I must not cast this in doubt. I should be certain that the one to whom I give the sacrament has been grabbed by the Gospel and believes

aright, as when I baptize someone I should not doubt the one who receives the baptism.

Thus you now have the correct and Christian use for the reception of the Sacrament. Furthermore, we shall speak of the fruit, which follows when one uses the Sacrament aright. The Holy Sacrament produces two things: one is that it makes us brothers and fellow heirs of the Lord Christ, such that it makes us one cake with Him; the other that we also become common and one with all other people upon earth and also all become one cake. These two benefits Paul emphasized in I Corinthians 10. We should all know this passage along with those words by which Christ instituted the Sacrament. Thus Saint Paul said, “we are all one bread and one drink, for we all participate in one bread and drink.” Likewise in the same passage he says, “Is it not so that the bread which we break is the distribution or participation of the body of Christ? And the cup of blessing which we bless, is it not the participation of the blood of Christ?” These words should be in full use and well-known in Christendom, since so much depends upon them.

When we eat the bread, he says, we all have one food. You have that which I have, and it makes no difference that you are man or woman. In that which we all have in common in the Sacrament, we all receive what Christ has and is. When I believe that His body and blood are mine, I have the Lord Christ whole and complete. Thus He makes my heart joyous and confident since I leave nothing to my own piety, but depend upon the innocent blood and the pure body that I receive there.

Now what does Christ have and what does He bring about? His body and blood are without sin, full of grace—yes, the corporal dwelling of the divine majesty. In short, everything God has is Christ’s. The benefits here become altogether mine, and because of this I have a sign and seal, or assurance, that such great and unspeakable benefits are mine when I receive the flesh and blood of Christ. Therefore in the Sacrament no sin is removed because of my work, as the poor, stupid people have been deluded. Sin is removed there because I truly believe that the body and blood are given for me. Therefore I am certain and sure that Christ graciously gives me all good things that He has, and all His strength and power. Thus He gives His wisdom, truth and godliness, and takes away all my sins. His eternal life gobbles up death for me. Through

His strength and power I defeat the devil. In the sacrament then a Christian man becomes an heir of eternal life and of all good things and an heir over all things, for which he can do nothing himself.

Such great benefits you cannot obtain by means of any work, though you conducted a thousand masses every day. Christ is such a high person, who gives Himself for you, that it is impossible that sin, death, hell and devil can remain for Him. Much less could you suppress the high majesty. Where His flesh and blood are, there He will certainly have one eye open, and not let that flesh and blood be trampled underfoot. Therefore since you have His flesh and blood, thus you have all the power which God Himself has. That is, we become one cake with the Lord Christ; we walk in the fellowship of His benefits and He in the fellowship of our misfortune. For here are thrown together His godliness and my sin, my weakness and His strength, and thus all is held in common. What is mine becomes His. What is His, I also have. This is a high unspeakable grace, over which the heart must become joyous and courageous.

Now if you are one cake with Christ, what more do you want? You now have incomparably more than your heart desires and you sit in paradise. This is what should have been emphasized when the Sacrament was treated. But it had gone so far under that one heard not a word about it. When one wanted to emphasize what the fruit of the Sacrament is, it was taught that a person who heard one mass a day would suffer no evil that day. Thus they connected it to external fortune and misfortune. And they did even more. They covered and hid the word so that no one in Christendom should hear or read it, and they claimed that the words in the mass are the holiest words. Who but the wretched devil in hell had spoken and brought it about that the words one should say and emphasize more than any other in Christianity, and should be better known than any other words, were covered and hidden?³ That means the devil ruled Christendom! Lord have mercy.

That is the first fruit of the Sacrament. The second is that we become one bread with one another, as Paul says, and one drink. These are extraordinary words, and they come in such a way that they are difficult to comprehend. That is entirely the reason that the Sacrament is turned into a work. How then does it happen that we all are one bread and partake of one another? It happens in this way: When I receive the Sacrament, I partake

twice. Externally I partake of the Sacrament, inwardly however and spiritually I receive all the benefits of Christ as though I ate physical bread that strengthens the body inwardly. Again, when I receive the Sacrament Christ takes me and devours me and gobbles me up together with my sins. I partake of His righteousness such that His godliness swallows up my sin and misery so that I have nothing but righteousness.

It is the same also among us. We all become one cake and partake of each other. You know that when a person bakes bread all the grain is thoroughly ground. Thus each kernel becomes flour with all the others, and thus all are mixed together so that in one sack full of flour the grain is so mixed and thrown together that each becomes the flour of the other. No kernel retains its form. Each gives to the other its flour and each loses its own body. Thus many small kernels of grain become one loaf of bread, just as in the same way when one makes wine, each grape mixes its juice with that of the others and each forsakes its form. From all comes one drink. Thus it should also be with us. I give myself for the common good and serve you, and you make use of what is mine of which you are in need. Thus I am your food, just as you make use of bread when you are hungry that in turn your body may help and give strength to the one who is hungry. Therefore when I help and serve you in all need, I am your bread. On the other hand, if you are also a Christian, you in your turn act in the same way that you, with everything you have, serve me. For me all comes together for good and I partake of the same as food or drink. If it happens that I am a sinner, and you by God's grace are pious, you strengthen me and you share your piety with me, pray for me, intercede before God for me, and cast all of it upon yourself. You swallow up my sin with your godliness just as Christ has done for us. Thus you partake of me, and I in turn partake of you.

There behold how unbelievably great a thing it is regarding that sacrament when one uses it in the right way, that a man must therein be delivered from death when he correctly perceives it for the great [thing that it is]. Reason can not conceive of it. Is it not great that the high Majesty steps forth for me and gives Himself to me for mine own, thereupon that all saints step forth for me and stand, take upon themselves what is mine and have concern for me, serve and help me? Thus God places us in the fellowship of Christ and all His chosen; there we have a great consolation

where we forsake ourselves. If I am a sinner, thus Christ stands there and says, "The sinner is mine whom I grab hold of with My holy fingers. Who will grumble about that?" Thus my sin falls away and I partake of His righteousness. Thus we Christians also do with each other, take upon ourselves that of another, so that one person bears the sin and failings of another and serves the other with his piety. This we don't understand, and if we likewise often hear and understand it, we don't believe it. And so we retreat ever more and experience no fruit or improvement.

These are the benefits of the Blessed Sacrament and that is the proper Christian use which consists briefly in this, that we conclude that a person understand the words which belong to the Sacrament, and then go to the Sacrament and confess that he is a Christian. Then one can take note and see whether those who receive the Sacrament demonstrate the fruit, which follows from it, and have demonstrated love. Where they will not act thus, one may exclude them from the community [*gemein*]; so that it may again come into vogue that one know who the true Christians are.

That is enough on this occasion regarding the reception of the Sacrament. Now we also want to say a little something about confession and briefly conclude. In confession there is also a word spoken by which the priest in God's stead absolves you. This word should not be despised. We do not desire to force anyone to recount all his sins, yet no one should go to the Sacrament if he despises confession. But we have often enough preached about that. When you wish to make confession, pay much more attention to your future life than the past, and do not do what has been done up to now. A person has gone to confession because it was commanded once each year. And consciences had been so plagued because a person had to recount every detail with all the circumstances. Only by recounting when, how and where, was it thought the confession was made, while there was no concern how one would improve the future life. Therefore it should be turned around and directed completely to the future. For it is soon forgiven that you have sinned in the past. You must see how you are beginning another life, that you are disgusted with your former life, and be satisfied with that.

See to it that you think about this matter in this way. If not, it does not help you if you go to confession every day of your life. When you return and go to confession it is to the end that

you allow yourself to be absolved and now think about leading a different life. Now you must say that your sin is taken away and God is pleased with you. The pope commanded and made a law of it that one must go to confession once a year at Easter, when one goes to the Sacrament. A person confessed everything that had been done the entire year. Thus from now it shall remain free. Those who are prepared to live a new life may make confession at when they desire. Some have thought sorrow over sin and the beginning of a different life are within our power and free will. So they have forced [confession] with laws, forced the people to confession, so that they have had to lie and say they are sorry for their sin when it is not true. They see this as comprehending confession.

The other part, which is also heard on this matter, is that you with true faith believe the absolution and not doubt that the word spoken to the one making confession is spoken by God himself. For God has thus humbled Himself such that He places His holy divine word in the mouth of men. This is so that we should absolutely not doubt that God Himself says it. Therefore we should also accept it as though God spoke it Himself. He has done it to you for your good. For you might not be able to bear it, if he Himself were to speak with you. Wouldn't you run to the end of the world if you heard that God Himself speaks there? This is what you have right at home in front of your door. Why can't you see it? And it is just as certain as your own front door—yes, still more certain. For here I have His promise, there I do not. Therefore prepare yourself thus to this end, that you believe and contemplate leading a different life. Otherwise it would be better for you to stay away from confession and the Sacrament. This will suffice for now.

Notes

¹ The sermon, here in English translation for the first time, is taken from WA Schriften, Teil 1, Band 12, pp. 472ff.

² Luther cites the text from memory, and according to the sense of the passage, not word for word.

³ Luther's complaint here refers to the contemporary practice of the celebrant whispering the "verba" or words of institution during the mass, such that they were inaudible to the laity.