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Cover Photo: The cover photo features the Walther Chalice. Popular myth states that it is one of two ornate European chalices that were brought over to the United States in the 1830's by the Saxons. Photo by Concordia Publishing House from the collection of Trinity Lutheran Church, St. Louis, Mo.

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The Holy Sup

ometimes we regard the most commonplace of things as the most insignificant. Perhaps this explains to some extent the increasing practice of Americans to "eat on the run." The line of cars at local "drive-throughs" is often longer than the lines within the restaurants. Food

and drink can be regarded as necessary "energy boosters," needed to satisfy the pangs of hunger and thirst, but hardly defining of who we are and what we are. We eat and drink when we can; convenience dictates the time of meal and repaste. Although we eat and drink every day, the time of eating and drinking is hardly regarded as defining moments of our busy lives.

How different it is with the Holy Supper! For by partaking in the Lord's Supper the people of God do not do something extraneous to whom they are. The eating and drinking of the Lord's Table is not some sort of "add on" to the reality of being a Christian. This eating and drinking is, strictly speaking, not something Christians "do" at all. It is the means by which Christians are Christians and remain Christians.

Such statements may at first seem extreme. But, let us see.

Traditionally, Lutherans have concluded the communion liturgy with the hymn, "Nunc Dimittis": "Lord, now let Your servant depart in peace according to Your word; For my eyes have seen Your salvation, which You have prepared before the face of all people, a Light to lighten the Gentiles and the Glory of Your people, Israel." What remarkable words! We declare in these words that our eyes have actually seen God's salvation, which is the Glory of Israel and the Light of the world. But what do our eyes see? This liturgical hymn assists us to recognize that the Bread and the Wine, which we have just eaten and drunk, that which we

have just seen and that which we have just tasted, are in fact that about which we have just heard. The pastor, standing at the altar, repeats the words of Jesus: "Take eat, this is My Body,

which is given for you; take drink, this cup is the New Testament in my blood, which is shed for you for the forgiveness of sins." We are given to see and to taste what we have been given to hear. And so in the Lord's Supper we experience by

participation—and through those senses which are the means through which we partake of all experience—that salvation which God has prepared for us.

The very sensory character of the Lord's Supper indicates what we always assert by way of doctrinal statement. The Bread and the Wine are the very Body and Blood of the

Lord Jesus, which He has commanded us to eat and to drink. The Lord's Supper is something concrete, particular, real; it is Body and Blood. It is not something merely otherworldly, spiritual, non-material; it is not merely "soul food." It is therefore received in a concrete, particular and real manner—by eating and drinking. Because it is the Body and Blood of Jesus, it is eaten and drunk even by those who do not believe what their ears have heard, namely, "This is My Body; this is My Blood." Even unbelievers eat and drink the very Body and Blood of the Lord Jesus whenever they partake of the Bread and the Wine. The eating and drinking by faith, therefore, is not separate from the actually eating and drinking of the Bread

and the Wine. Those who believe these words, "This is My Body; this is My Blood," rather faithfully eat and faithfully drink and receive in faith that which the Father gives through the giving up of His Son into death.

This is to say that the forgiveness of sins, and the Life of the Spirit which comes with that forgiveness, is bound to a particular Body and to a particular Blood. On the very night in which Jesus was betrayed, He "instituted" the Supper, which was His own. By means of this "institution" Jesus gave to His Church for all times and all places that Supper, which would be the place and the time of His death for the forgiveness of sins. We may put it like this: the death of Christ which occurred once is "for us" in the Lord's Supper. As hard as it may be to imagine, the time and the place of the cross of Christ may not be separated from the time and the place of the Lord's Supper. "This is My

Body given for you"—namely, the Bread which you are about to eat.

"This is My Blood shed for the forgiveness of sins"—namely, the Wine which you are about to drink. Participation in the Lord's

Supper places us at Calvary. Or more accurately, in the Lord's Supper, God brings Calvary to us. That is why in the liturgy, before the words of institution are spoken, we sing the "Sanctus": "Holy, Holy, Holy, Lord God of Sabaoth . . . Blessed

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is He who comes in the Name of the Lord." In these words the never-ending hymn of heaven (Isaiah 6; Revelation 4) is combined with the hymn of the people of Jerusalem, which they sang when Jesus entered Jerusalem to die (Matt. 21:9). Through this liturgical hymn we are reminded that in the person of Jesus heaven and earth are united, and most especially in the death of the Incarnate Son when sins are forgiven making man at peace with God. In the Jerusalem to which Jesus came to die, there is heaven and the Kingdom of God. Not surprisingly, the final

visions of John are of the New Jerusalem, which comes down from heaven and in which the Lamb is on the throne (Rev. 21:10). What John sees is in fact the coming of the New Jerusalem in the coming of the Lord Jesus, namely, in His coming in the Bread and the Wine. "Come, Lord Jesus" (Rev. 22:17). This point is made explicit in the first century text, The Didache, where the hymn of Jerusalem ("Hosanna to the God of David") is conjoined with the "Come, Lord Jesus" of the New Jerusalem (Didache 10:6).

Since the Body and the Blood, given and shed for us, are the place of heaven and of the New Jerusalem, we see why the song of Simeon (Luke 2:29-32, "Nunc Dimittis") so early

became a hymn within the eucharistic liturgy. For the Child, which Simeon saw, the Child, which was brought to Simeon so that He might be dedicated to God as "holy," according to the requirements of the Law (Luke 2:22-24)—that Child became the Crucified in whose death the Law was fulfilled. In His death Christ was both Priest and Sacrifice, offering Himself up to God as an acceptable sacrifice. Through His steadfast faithfulness even to death, Jesus gave to His Father that right worship, which exists in faith alone. Likewise, in His death for us, Christ fulfilled the law of love, giving all that He is and possesses for our eternal good. And so, in the death of Jesus we recognize those two aspects which define the life of the Christian, namely, the worship of faith and the sacrifice of love.

This sacrifice, which Christ made to God and for us, becomes our own sacrifice when we eat the Bread, which is His Body given for us, and when we drink the Wine, which is His Blood shed for the forgiveness of sins. Bound to Him who is Priest and Sacrifice, we become a priestly people who render ourselves as sacrifices to God through faith and through a life of love toward our neighbor. This should be understood, once more, in a totally concrete, particular and real manner. When we eat His Body and drink His Blood we become members of His Body and of His Blood, that is, we become members of that Body and Blood given and shed for the sake of sinners. We, in soul and body,

> become the Body of Christ and so are sent forth on the way of peace to serve our neighbor through the forgiveness of sins and the vocation of charity. It is this of which Paul speaks: "By the mercies of God, present your bodies to God, which is your spiritual worship" (Rom. 12:1). Moreover, since Christ fulfilled all Old Testament sacrificial worship in His death, He began the worship "in Spirit and in Truth" of which the Gospel of John speaks (John 4:24). To partake of His death in the faithful eating of His Body and the faithful drinking of His Blood is to worship rightly in Spirit and in Truth. No higher worship exists than this, to commune at the Lord's Table in

thank and praise the Lord for the gifts which are proffered to us which occurs in the communion liturgy of Lutheran Worship: "What shall I render to the Lord for all His benefits to me? I will Lord. I will take the cup of salvation and will call on the name of the Lord. I will pay my vows to the Lord now in the presence of you, O Jerusalem" (p. 169).

faith. For that reason, communion in the Lord's Body and Blood is surrounded by liturgy and hymn through which we for the salvation of our souls and our bodies. This is given expression in the short hymn What shall I render to the Lord, offer the sacrifice of thanksgiving and will call on the name of the all His people, in the courts of the Lord's house, in the midst of

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