

THE RECEPTION OF HOLY COMMUNION Fourth:

M: Who, then, is properly prepared to receive this sacrament?

C: Fasting and other outward preparations may serve a good purpose, but he is properly prepared who believes these words: “Given” and “poured out for you for the forgiveness of sins.”

But whoever does not believe these words or doubts them is not prepared, because the words “for you” require nothing but hearts that believe.

TEXT: 1 Corinthians 11:28

Let a person examine himself and after doing so, let him eat of the bread and drink from the cup.

Dear Fellow-Redeemed by the Blood of the Lamb:

There’s not much fasting these days before going to the Lord’s Supper—not like my parents who wanted to taste the “best food” first. They knew that refraining from breakfast until after church didn’t make them better communicants, but they used this practice to heighten their appreciation. There’s not a lot of dressing up for the Lord’s Table either—though I think that if we dress up for other occasions, we ought to do so even more for the Lord’s Supper. There isn’t much announcing for Holy Communion either. It used to be that people announced to the pastor a week or a day or two before Communion so that they could give some serious thought to what was coming. Then we put a check by our name in the Communion book just before or after we commune. Now we skip that step altogether. Changes come and changes go with these outward preparations for Holy Communion, but some things dare not change if we are to use his Supper with benefit and blessing.

COME AS A HELPLESS SINNER

Attendance at the Lord’s Supper is serious business. We Christians know this and want to be prepared. We have heard Paul’s warning about being guilty of the body and blood and of the Lord and we don’t want to receive such precious food to our judgment. We know Paul’s urging: **“Let a person examine himself and after doing so, let him eat of the bread and drink from the cup” (1 Cor 11:28 EHV).** We begin such an examination with our heart. We turn to the law, using the Ten Commandments like God’s holy fingers pointing to and pressing painfully on our heart. By society’s standards, many of our sins might appear trivial. There may be no outright murder or adultery, no ending a neighbor’s life or enticing away her husband or his wife. But by God’s standards, our anger and hating, our looking and lusting, our caring for ourselves at everyone else’s, including our God’s, expense are just as intolerable and offensive in his sight. We have been disobedient servants of God. And there’s nothing we can do, except turn as helpless sinners to the God of all grace. He has given us a password for entrance into his presence. It’s “Lord, have mercy.” With this plea, we approach his holy Table.

RECEIVE AS A PENITENT BELIEVER

Tears of sorrow cannot wash away our guilt. Only one hand can erase the lengthy debit columns under our names in God's record book. Only one hand can wipe them clean. That hand has nail prints in it. Jesus—God's obedient servant—stretched those hands out in full payment on the cross for all our sins. In his Supper, he now stretches those same hands out to us in comforting assurance with that forgiveness. **“This is my body,”** he says, “believe it.” **“This is my blood,”** he says, “believe it.” **“Given and poured out for the forgiveness of sins,”** he says, “believe it.” **“For you,”** he says, “believe it.”

The feet of faith that carry us to his altar may be weak and frail. They may hesitate and falter, but God has promised that when we come in penitent faith, he will not cast us out. When we approach with the penitent sigh of Paul, **“What a wretched man I am! Who will rescue me from this body that is subject to death? Thanks be to God, who delivers me through Jesus Christ our Lord!” (Romans 7:24-25).** With the work of Jesus Christ as our Substitute, as the Obedient Servant, we have the confidence to approach his holy Table today.

LEAVE AS AN OBEDIENT CHILD

“Be of good cheer. Your sins are forgiven,” Jesus says to us in his Supper. As we leave, Jesus—The Obedient Servant has something else to say: “Go and sin no more.” We cannot approach his Table asking him to keep his fingers off our pet sins. What value is there in such an approach? Nor can we leave his Table without resolving to fight against our sins. What kind of appreciation would that indicate? With sins forgiven and faith strengthened, it's “Lord, help me in the fight against my sins.” Though we may not always win the battle, though we may fall even before we leave the church doors, the battle needs to be waged and won more frequently. With this resolve, we can leave his holy Table.

Not much fasting these days, not as much dressing up, not nearly as much personal announcing—but coming as a helpless sinner, receiving as a penitent believer, and leaving as his obedient child will always be necessary.

Let us pray: O Jesus, name above every name, make each of us into such a worthy communicant! Amen.