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Midweek Lent V

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Grace-Trinity Lutheran Churches, Wichita

Praying the Faith: Holy Communion

In the name of the Father and of the ✠ Son and of the Holy Spirit

Our Lutheran Confessions have one main goal:
to show that we are saying and believing nothing new.

We have no new practices, no new beliefs, no new faith, no new ideas—nothing to contribute.
We are most Lutheran when we are most boring—
we simply believe and worship the same way the Church has always done before.

And we like it that way.

We confess the faith as we received it.
We believe as we have been taught according to the Scriptures.
We worship as it has come to us through the tradition of the Church.

That's how our confessions go.

And the center of all our faith and all our worship is what our Confessions call *The Mass*.
Article XXIV says,

*“Our churches are falsely accused of abolishing the Mass.
The Mass is held among us and celebrated with the highest reverence...
Because the Mass is for the purpose of giving the Sacrament,
we have Communion every [Lord's day and on the other festivals],
and if anyone desires the Sacrament, we also offer it on other days,
when it is given to all who ask for it.
This custom is not new in the Church.”* (AC XXIV 1, 34; cf. Apology XXIV.1)

It's not new.

We're not making it up.

We're just living and doing as all the saints before:
the Mass is the heart and soul, the center of the Christian life—
everything builds up towards it, and flows down from it.

So what is this *Mass* that our confessions believe is so central to our Christian faith and life?
Once we see and believe what it is, then we'll run to it as often as we can!

For what it is, we need the Words of Institution.
Apart from the Words of Jesus, nothing is anything at all.

Four times in Scripture we hear these words:

in three of the Gospels, and in St. Paul's letter to the Corinthians.
*“Our Lord, Jesus Christ, on the night when He was betrayed, took bread,
and when He had given thanks, He broke it and gave it to the disciples and said:
“Take, eat; this is My body, which is given for you.
This do in remembrance of Me.”
In the same way also He took the cup after supper, and when He had given thanks,*

*He gave it to them, saying,
 “Drink of it, all of you; this cup is the new testament in My blood,
 which is shed for you for the forgiveness of sins.
 This do, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of Me.”*

Jesus spoke these words once before He died, and once after He rose again.
 Both times He said “*this IS.*”

That little word “*is,*” helps us to realize why the Mass is central to our faith and life.
 That “*is*” tells us that the Mass is Jesus.

We sometimes call it “*The Lord’s Supper*”—
 that’s what Paul says in 1 Corinthians,
 “*When you come together, it is not the Lord’s Supper that you eat.*” (1 Cor 11:20)

Other times we call it “*The Eucharist,*”
 which is simply Greek for “*Thanksgiving*”—
 this comes from the Gospels:

“He took bread, and when He had given thanks (Eucharist)...”.

Our Catechism calls the Mass “*The Sacrament of the Altar.*”

“*Sacrament*” is the Latin translation for the Greek “*Mysteria*”—*mystery!*

And Paul says of himself and other pastors:

*“That is how one should regard us,
 as servants of Christ and stewards of the mysteries of God.”* (1 Cor 4:1)

And then there’s *Holy Communion.*

St. Paul says,

*“The cup of blessing that we bless, is it not communion in the blood of Christ?
 The bread that we break, is it not communion in the body of Christ?”* (1 Cor 10:16)

All of these names: *Lord’s Supper, Eucharist, Sacrament of the Altar, Holy Communion, Mass*—
 they all are ways of saying “Here’s Jesus!”

That’s what’s going on.

That’s why this is so central to our faith and life—
 here Jesus comes to us.

And because the same Jesus who was born of Mary and died on Calvary comes to this altar,
 we speak and act and worship in a way that confesses exactly that.

We believe in the *Communion of Saints.*

That is, the body of Christ.

And it’s this *body of Christ* on the altar that *bodies* together the *body of Christ*—His Church.
 We’re brought together into communion with God and with each other at this altar.

Here we are forgiven together.

And so we also rejoice and confess and believe together.

By faith we recognize together that Jesus comes to us—
 giving His gifts,
 feeding His lambs,
 multiplying oil and flour and loaves and fish and Manna and joy.

This feast at the Altar is the feast that binds us together as One Church, the Body of Christ.

And that's why we thank and praise, worship and adore Jesus—
 especially as He comes to us in the breaking of the bread.

Now, how can you adore Him in the breaking of the bread?

First by believing.

Faith is always our foremost act of devotion.

It's the gift of God that clings to His Word, trusts what He says, and receives what He gives.

By faith we then receive the Sacrament.

We believe these words above all others:

Given and shed for you for the forgiveness of sins.

These words, Luther says in the Catechism, deliver what they say.

By believing we have what Christ gives: *forgiveness of sins, life and salvation.*

And we need this.

You can't get through life without it.

But too often we try.

Too often we excuse our children and our grandchildren, our brothers and sister, and parents.

We show our unbelief in these words when we treat the Sacrament as secondary.

This isn't just a meal, or a victory lap, or an empty ritual, or anything less than Jesus for us.

And if it's Jesus for us, then run to it as often as you can.

As often as you've got sin clinging to your skin and bones, run to the flesh and blood of Jesus.

As often as it's offered, as often as it's given—

come, run, take, eat, drink of it all of you—

for this Mass, this Sacrament of the Altar, this Holy Communion is Jesus for you.

Here you have life from the dead, joy amidst suffering,

and communion in a body, when you thought you were all alone.

You can never get enough, and you'll never not need it.

It's always for you—Jesus for you.

Let us pray for a hunger for the Mass—for the passion and desire among us to be the Church.

And we're most Church when joined to Christ, bodied into His Body, in communion with Him.

In the name of the Father and of the ✠ Son and of the Holy Spirit