



Sacrament of the Altar

The Sacrament of the Altar

Read:

Look up 1 Corinthians 11:23-26. These words should sound familiar to you. The pastor says them or words very similar to them every time we celebrate the Lord's Supper (Communion) at church.

The Sacrament of the Altar, Communion,
Holy Communion The Lord's Supper, The Eucharist...

These all mean the same thing: taking the bread and wine, the body and blood of Jesus for the forgiveness of sins and strengthening.

The roots of the Lord's Supper can be found all the way back in Exodus chapter 12, 1,450 years before Jesus was born. This is the story of Moses leading the Israelites out of slavery in Egypt. God promised to send one final plague, the one where He would strike down the firstborn of every person and animal in Egypt. The only way to be saved from this plague was to put the blood of a three-year-old, spotless male lamb on the doorframe of their house. God promised that He would pass over the houses with the lamb's blood on their door frame.

To celebrate God saving them from slavery in Egypt, God's people observed the Passover as a holy day from then on. Every year they would eat the same foods: unleavened bread (bread without yeast), lamb, wine, haroseth, and bitter herbs, and tell the story again of God's saving power. They did this every year to remember what God had done for them.

Jesus and His disciples had been observing the Passover their whole lives. So on the night before Jesus was crucified, when they sat down to the familiar meal the disciples thought they knew how it would go. But Jesus changed things. When He passed around the bread He said, "Take and eat, this bread is my body." And when He passed around the wine He said, "Take and drink, this wine is my blood." And then He said, "Do this in remembrance of Me."

Jesus took the ritual of Passover and made it bigger and broader. Now it wasn't just about God freeing His people from slavery in Egypt, it was about God freeing His people from slavery to sin. He, Jesus, was the new Passover Lamb. Perfect, sinless, spotless. And His blood would save His people from their sin. The original Passover had been just a glimpse of the bigger story of salvation that God was planning and that was now unfolding in front of the disciples' eyes.

From the very beginning of the church Christians have been celebrating the Lord's Supper. In the early church, they celebrated the Lord's Supper as a part of a full meal that the people ate together. Later the Lord's Supper had its own part in the church's worship service and it became more as we celebrate it today.

But through the centuries, Jesus' followers have celebrated this meal just as Jesus shared it with His disciples, using bread and wine and the words, "This is my body...., this is my blood." We celebrate it to remember Him and His death and resurrection. And we celebrate it to receive the gifts and blessings that He gives us: the forgiveness of sins, life, and salvation.

Reflect:

When do you first remember paying attention to what was going on in Communion?

Do you remember what you thought about it?

What do you remember about taking Communion for the first time?

The Sacrament of the Altar: Truly Present

Read:

Read the Sacrament of the Altar on pages 30 and 31 in your catechism and Matthew 26:26-28 in your Bible.

Sometimes Jesus would use picture language to communicate with His followers. He would say, "The kingdom of heaven is like a mustard seed," or "the kingdom of heaven is like a treasure buried in a field." He used these words to help His followers understand something that was beyond them. But when Jesus gave His disciples the Lord's Supper He said, "This bread is my body. This wine is my blood." He didn't say it the bread was like His body, that the wine was like His blood. He said is.

As Lutheran Christians, we take Jesus' choice of words seriously. We believe that His body and His blood are actually present with the bread and the wine. In the same way that Jesus is God and man joined in a supernatural, incomprehensible but true way, the bread and His body, the wine, and His blood are joined. We call this teaching the real presence.

Why is it so important? For one because we have to be careful to take Jesus at His word and not limit what He says is true to what we can understand with our human limitation. For another, we know that Jesus wants us to be deeply connected to Him. He says things like, "Remain in Me and I will remain in you. (John 15:4)" to show how deeply He wants us to be connected to Him. When we understand that in Communion we are taking Jesus' very self into us we catch a glimpse of that deep connection. It's mysterious, yes, but we take by faith what God says is true.

Reflect:

What is better...going to Disney or doing an internet search for Disney and looking at the pictures? Why?

What is better...having a best friend that you can be with, talk to, laugh, and do things with or having a list of characteristics of a good friend?
Why?

Why does understanding that Jesus is really present in Communion help us understand the deep connection He wants to have with us?

Write:

How would you explain the mystery of Jesus' real presence in The Lord's Supper to someone who didn't understand it?

Respond:

The next time you take Communion (and every time after that) pause and remember the real, true, and actual presence of Jesus' body and blood in, with, and under the bread and wine.

The Sacrament of the Altar: God's Power at Work

Read:

Read the Sacrament of the Altar on pages 30 and 31 in your catechism and Mark 4:35-41 in your Bible.

In the Bible you will see God often uses something ordinary, like water in baptism, to do an extraordinary act, like giving forgiveness of sins. In the Sacrament of the Altar, He does it again. There's nothing special about the bread or the wine, the pastor giving it to you is just as sinful as you are. But, just like in baptism, when the ordinary elements are combined with God's powerful word the results are beyond imagination. In Communion, we receive everything Jesus came to give: forgiveness of sins; strengthening of our faith now; and assurance of eternal life with Jesus. The power of Communion is in God's word. (Did you notice how powerful Jesus' words were in the Mark passage you just read?)

Because Communion is such a powerful gift we might be tempted to not want to take it when our faith feels weak. When we're feeling guilty and convicted of our sins we might think we're not worthy to take Jesus' body and blood. Wrong! This is exactly the time when we should take Communion. Do you remember way back to the lesson on Law and Gospel? When we're feeling the weight of the Law, the evidence that points to our failure to live like God's child...that's when we need the Gospel the most. And Communion is pure Gospel!

So, yes, we take the Lord's Supper seriously. We prepare ourselves to receive it by recognizing our sins and, in sorrow, confessing them to God. We ask for His help to live as new creations turning from sin and the devil. And then we receive Jesus' body and blood confident that He is our Savior and with faith in His words, "Given and shed for you for the forgiveness of sins."

Reflect:

What are some places in the Bible where you can remember God's word doing powerful things?

Why is it important to remember that the power of Communion has nothing to do with us, but everything to do with God's word?

Write:

Re-read Mark 4:35-41. How would you describe what happened there? What did the wind and waves do? Why did they do it? Why was Jesus' word able to quiet them?

Respond:

What steps can you take, before you receive Communion, to remember your sinfulness and God's mighty, loving, forgiving power?

The Sacrament of the Altar: Reflection

Now that you've worked through the Sacrament of the Altar reflect a bit on it as a whole.

Reflect:

What about the Lord's Supper is most important to you?

Write:

Why is it important to believe in the real presence of Jesus' body and blood in the Lord's Supper?

Why is it important to recognize that it is God's power at work in the Lord's Supper?

How has your understanding of Jesus' love for you changed or deepened after working through these lessons?

Respond:

Pray a prayer asking God to help you remember the sacrifice of Jesus for you and to receive Communion with joy.

Chapter 2 The Sacrament of the Altar

Family Homework:

Family Homework is meant to be an opportunity to get the family talking about spiritual things. Multiple studies show that parents and grandparents are the #1 faith role models in a student's life. We know life is busy, but we want to give you opportunities to grow together. The best time to do this is together in the car, while eating a meal together, or simply anytime you can spend some time together. Don't focus quite so much on the 'perfect' answers, focus on the time together.

Parent & Child Conversation:

- Talk to a parent or someone in your family who has been taking communion a long time.
- **Do you remember your first communion?**
- **When and where was it at?**
- **How was your first communion celebrated? (Is there anything your church or family did that was special?)**
- **What do you remember about how you felt about it?**
- **How has the Lord's Supper been an important part of your faith?**
- **How do you prepare your heart to receive the Lord's Supper?**
- **What about the Lord's Supper is most important to you?**

Parent Signature _____