

Holy (Maundy) Thursday (4/1/10 – *Our Daily Bread and the Cross of Christ*)

In the Name JESUS. [Amen]

The theme for our meditation this evening – as we consider this most blessed Testament of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ ... given on the night in which He was betrayed – is: *Our Daily Bread and the Cross of Christ*. This is a continuation of our midweek *Lenten* theme on *The Lord's Prayer and the Cross of Christ*.

In the *Small Catechism* Dr. Luther has taught us to understand the *Fourth Petition* of the prayer our Lord Jesus Christ has given us in this way:

*God certainly gives **daily bread** to everyone without our prayers, even to all evil people, but we pray in this petition that God would lead us to realize this and to receive our **daily bread** with thanksgiving.*

Luther goes on to explain that:

***Daily bread** includes everything that has to do with the support and needs of the body, such as food, drink, clothing, shoes, house, home, land, animals, money, goods, a devout husband or wife, devout children, devout workers, devout and faithful rulers, good government, good weather, peace, health, self-control, good reputation, good friends, faithful neighbors, and the like.*

That is one of our sin problems, then – that we do **not** realize and sufficiently give thanks to God for everything that has to do with the support and needs of the body. Where is our thanksgiving for the food and drink that God sets upon our table? Do we not, rather, consider it to be of our own doing – hard-earned by the sweat of our brow, as it were ... and therefore **deserved**? We quickly pray a table prayer – **if** we remember ... **if** we're not in a hurry ... if it won't be too **conspicuous** when we're at work or school or out in public. But we are just like those people the Lord warns and laments in Holy Scripture: *This people honors Me with their lips, but their heart is*

far from Me [ISA 29.13; MT 15.8]. We pray with our lips – if we pray – but our hearts and thoughts are somewhere else ... anxiously waiting to take the first bite (as if we were starving to death and would die if we didn't) ... anxious to be done with prayer to get on to the real “meat and potatoes.” For our failure to realize that **God** is the Giver of all we have and for our failure to thank and praise Him as we ought, we must repent.

This evening we consider another sort of bread – namely the Bread (and the Wine) of the *Holy Supper* that Christ our Lord instituted on the night in which He was betrayed. You may wonder why I have pulled in the *Lenten* midweek theme of the *Lord's Prayer* into this context. You see, the Church very early placed the *Lord's Prayer* within the *Liturgy of the Sacrament of the Altar* – and that is where the Church still prays it today. There are several good and Scriptural reasons that come to mind for this. First and foremost among them would be the fact that in JOHN 6 Jesus says: ***I AM the Bread that came down from heaven*** [6.41]. There – the day after He fed the 5,000 on five loaves and two fish – Jesus directs those who received their *daily bread* from the hand of the Lord to that heavenly and eternal Sustenance necessary for true and everlasting life ... namely, **HIMSELF!** And that is where He would direct **our** hearts also this evening – and always.

Now our Lord Jesus Christ, when He was tempted in the wilderness by the evil one to make bread from a stone, responded: ***Man does not live by bread alone, but by every Word that proceeds from the mouth of God*** [MT 4.4; DEU 8.3]. So it is that in the *Lord's Supper*, it is not by anything that **we DO** – not by my pastoral action nor by the holiness of those who receive – but **only** by the Word of Christ that the Body that was broken and the Blood that was shed on the Cross for our salvation are found in this blessed *Sacrament* ... put there by the Savior to assure us of the forgiveness of sins He purchased and won for us on His Cross ... and thereby to strengthen our faith toward God and our fervent love toward one another.

What's more, this *Word that proceeds from the mouth of God* upon which we live is Christ Himself – the Bread from heaven ... the Word made Flesh ... Who gives His Flesh for the salvation of the world on the Cross. As He says in verse 51 of JOHN 6: *I AM the Living Bread that came down from heaven. If anyone eats of this Bread, he will live forever. And the bread that I will give for the life of the world is My Flesh.*

In the context of the *Lord's Supper*, then, despite what seems to be the primary – at least, surface – meaning of the *Fourth Petition: Give us this day our daily bread* as a prayer to receive and duly recognize and honor God as the One Who gives every good and perfect gift to bless us *with the support and needs of the body*, our hearts and souls are turned to consider another aspect of God's provision of *daily bread* ... namely, everything that has to do with the support and needs of our **spirits**. And in particular, when we pray the *Lord's Prayer* in the context of celebrating *Holy Communion*, our thoughts cannot help but consider that here we receive the crucified and resurrected Body and Blood of Him Who is the Living Bread from heaven – in, with, and under the Bread and Wine of the *Sacrament* – given to us Christians to eat and to drink for forgiveness, life, and salvation.

Consider even Luther's more materially focused explanation of the meaning of this petition: *God certainly gives daily bread to everyone without our prayers, even to all evil people, but we pray in this petition that God would lead us to realize this and to receive our daily bread with thanksgiving.* Based upon Holy Scripture – as it is – this explanation certainly applies to those things that have *to do with the support and needs of the body*. But we can also apply it to a right and Scriptural understanding of the *Sacrament*. The Bread and Wine that also convey the Body and Blood of Christ are given to (and received by) **all** who partake, *even ... all evil people*. It is not my worthiness as celebrant, nor your worthiness as communicant – not even weak faith – that puts the Body and Blood of Christ

in the *Supper*. And it is not that the Body and Blood of Jesus are there for believers only, but absent for unbelievers or the impenitent who partake at the Altar Rail. That is precisely why the Lutheran Church – in keeping with Holy Scripture and the ancient and continuous practice of the one, holy, Christian and Apostolic Church – has taught and practiced *Close* or *Closed Communion*. For, even evil people – even unbelievers and those who are in unrepentant sin and those who do not believe the clear Word of Scripture regarding the true Body and Blood presence of Christ in the *Supper* – **all communicants**, even evil people, receive the Body and Blood of Jesus in, with, and under the Bread and Wine of this *Holy Communion*. By the Word – by Christ’s Words ... by the Words of Our Lord which He spoke first on that night long ago on when He was betrayed into the hands of sinners by a kiss ... by the Words of Our Lord which He speaks each and every time His *Sacrament* is celebrated according to His command – it is by God’s Word alone that the Body and Blood of Christ our Lord are in the *Supper* ... bringing with them all the fruits and blessings of His work for us and for our salvation on the Cross.

Thus we also pray in this petition that our gracious God *would lead us to realize* the great gift of forgiveness and salvation that He offers and gives us in the *Sacrament* – on account of the Cross of Christ – and *would lead us to receive* this heavenly, living, and life-giving *Bread* (and Wine) which are the Body and Blood of the Son of God in repentant faith and *with great thanksgiving* for our God’s inexpressible gift [2COR 9.15].

Our Father, Who art in heaven ... give us this day our daily bread. Give us the very Body and Blood of our Lord Jesus Christ, which He willingly sacrificed upon the Cross to bring us forgiveness, life, and salvation ... and grant that we receive it in repentance, faith, and thanksgiving for our eternal benefit.

In the Name of the FATHER and of the ✠ SON and of the HOLY SPIRIT. [Amen]