

Some Insights Into The Lord's Supper 1 Corinthians 11:23-30

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A Communion service was being held in a little Church in New Zealand where the folk went forward and knelt at the rail to receive the bread and wine. Among the first group to go forward was a native first generation Christian who knelt at the rail and then, for some reason, rose and returned to his seat. A little later, he took his place again and received the elements with the others. When he was questioned about it afterward he told this story: "When I went to the table I did not know whom I should have to kneel beside, when suddenly I saw next to me that man who a few years before slew my father, and whom I then swore to kill. Imagine how I felt when I found him kneeling by my side. A rush of feeling came over me which I could not endure, and then I went back to my seat. But when I got there I saw again the Upper Room and the Great Supper, and I seemed to hear a voice saying, 'By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another.' That overpowered me. I sat down and at once seemed to see in my mind a cross with a man nailed to it; and I heard him say, 'Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do.' Then I returned to the rail and received the bread and the wine."

Such a probing and moving experience must have been in the mind of our Lord when the Supper was placed in the very heart of the Church. Paul surely was thinking of such a searching experience when he wrote: "Examine yourselves, and only then eat of the bread and drink of the cup" (1 Cor. 11:28). Perhaps we come to the table too easily. It is meant to be a soul-searching experience. At the same time, we know it can be made too difficult. Paul's words about eating and drinking "unworthily" have been much misunderstood (1 Cor. 11:29 KJV). The RSV translates "unworthily" as "without discerning the body." Phillips, "without proper reverence." "Unworthily" is an adverb referring to the attitude of the worshipper, not an adjective describing his or her worthiness. None of us are ever good enough to be considered worthy of coming to the Table. "All the fitness he requires is to feel your need of him."

The Lord's Supper is the most definitive act of Christian worship. It is that service which is most characteristically Christian....In it the whole Gospel is contained and set forth. Besides this, it is the only act of Christian corporate worship, apart from Baptism, for which we have our Lord's direct command, and for which we have New Testament example. ...It is the Lord's own service on the Lord's own day" (William Robinson, *The Administration of the Lord's Supper*, 7).

The Lord's Supper brings us to the cross of Jesus Christ and to all that he did there for us. "Christ died—for me." There we see what it cost God to forgive the sin of the world. Sin is not something that can be canceled with the stroke of a pen. Sin can only be conquered by the power of sacrifice. That sacrifice was made for us in the blessed death of Jesus Christ. When Paul speaks of God's remedy for sin he employs three picture-phrases: redemption, justification, and reconciliation. Redemption sees our plight as servitude in a slave-market. Justification sees us as condemned in a court of law. Reconciliation sees our condition as alienation within personal

relations. In the Cross of Christ we have been emancipated, justified, reconciled. But we have to make God's gift our own. We can do that in three ways: (1) By Faith (obedient trust) when, with our sense of separation and alienation from God upon us we put ourselves into the hands of the crucified and living Christ for now and forever; (2) In the Holy Communion when—still by faith—we appropriate the spiritual benefits of Christ's death symbolized in the broken bread and outpoured wine; (3) By sacrificial living when, remembering what Christ has done for us, we give ourselves for others in service and selfless love as he gave himself for us. We also offer ourselves as a living sacrifice—learning to forgive the person who has wronged us, to love our enemy, to conquer pride, to deny the sins that do so easily beset us. These sacrifices are so costly and difficult that they help us to understand both the humiliation and the agony of the cross. Through such sacrifices we enter a higher, richer life.

In the Lord's Supper we come face to face with a most pressing problem—how to keep men and women faithful and growing in Christ. The need to lead persons to Christ as Savior and Lord is ever before us. But, the need to see persons grow and develop in Christ is just as urgent. If we do not grow, we die. Where can we find light by which to live, power by which to progress, grace by which to grow? How do we keep going after we become a Christian? I believe there is a vital relationship between these questions and the Lord's Supper. To explore that relationship is a great need today because a large segment of the Christian community gives little or no attention to the biblical sacraments of Baptism and the Lord's Supper. You seldom, if ever, hear them mentioned by the most popular television preachers. Probably because they are controversial. We get large doses of personal experiences and decisions for Christ with a heavy dose of "I" running through each encounter with Christ, who is spoken of in a buddy-buddy sort of way. There is an obvious focus on the troubles and fears and disappointments which people experience and each preacher makes a special effort to assure their listeners that "God loves you" (Bakker), "you are loved" (Humbard), "God loves you and so do I" (Schuller). Professor Eugene F. Klug writes in the *Concordia Theological Quarterly* (October, 1981) on "The Electronic Church"—"Man has always preferred something internal, something within himself, to the promise which God has attached to his Word, the Gospel, to the water of baptism, to the body and blood of Christ in the Lord's Supper" (quoted in *Evangelical newsletter*, May 14, 1982). We are going to begin looking at the meaning of the Lord's Supper by exploring some of the names by which the rite is known.

THE LORD'S SUPPER.

There are two or three good reasons for calling this meal the Lord's Supper.

First of all, it was instituted by Jesus. In the closing week of our Lord's earthly life he said to his disciples, "I have eagerly desired to eat this Passover with you before I suffer" (Luke 22:15). For more than three thousand years faithful Jews have celebrated the feast of Passover, and today they follow exactly the same ritual as they followed in the days of Jesus. A family or a group of families offers a prayer of thanksgiving, all present drink from a cup of wine, then the youngest present asks the question, "What do you mean by this service?" The elders explain to them that the Feast of the Passover is a memorial of God's deliverance of his people from slavery in Egypt. In gratitude for this mighty act of God they sing Psalms of praise and then partake of the feast in a way that dramatizes the events of the Exodus. The head of the family breaks unleavened bread

and gives a piece to each person, and this is followed by the roasted lamb and the bitter herbs. Then, as a form of grace after meals, he takes a cup called the Cup of Blessing; they sing other Psalms, and the service ends.

It was during this memorial meal that Jesus rose, took a piece of bread and thanked God for it. Then he broke it, gave it to the disciples and said, "Take, eat; this is my body which is for you." It was a picture of what was to happen the following day when Jesus was crucified. Then he took a cup and gave it to them saying, "Drink this, all of you, for it is my blood, the blood of the New Agreement (covenant) shed to set many free from their sins" (Matt. 26:28 Phillips). In effect Jesus said: "This cup represents the new basis on which God will deal with you. You are no longer subject to the old arrangement, according to which by obedience to the law you must win for yourself divine approval. This cup stands for the new arrangement, the new covenant, the new agreement. Just as this wine pours from the cup, so am I pouring out my life for you. If only you will believe that, and trust the love that is behind it, you will find acceptance with God and forgiveness of sins." It is the Lord's Supper because Jesus instituted it.

Jesus, then, went on to say, "Do this in remembrance of me." Thus, the meal is called the Lord's Supper not only because he instituted it, but because it is a memorial to him. It is a means of remembering. Jesus did not want us to forget his death so he gave us this table of memory. He knew our memories are short. We all have things that remind us.

On my right hand I wear a beautiful gold ring. My dear friend, Guy Eastman, who was a long-time member of Westwood Hills until his recent death, made it for me. He actually made another ring exactly like this for me, but when I had it sized for my finger it was a bit too large and somewhere it slipped from my finger and was lost. One day in the convalescent hospital Guy noticed the ring was gone and asked me about it. I regretted to have to tell him it was lost. He said, "When I get back home I will make another ring for you." But he never was able to return home. He died. His wife of 67 years, Harriett, heard about the ring I lost and on the Sunday of Guy's memorial service in the sanctuary Harriett called me over following the service, took a small brown envelope from her purse, and gave me this ring. She said, "I wouldn't do this for anyone else, but I know Guy would want you to have it. I took it from his finger after he died." I look at my beautiful ring and remember my kind and generous friend, Guy Eastman. That ring is a memorial.

Persons become like the thoughts they hold, like the memories they cherish. Whatever a person's mental life is, it will affect his actions. It is the very truth, "As a man thinks in his heart, so is he" As we entertain bad thoughts, our own character becomes bad, cheap and common. As we hold high and holy memories, our lives are made strong and sturdy and true. To remember Christ, to cherish the thought of him, is to harbor heaven in your heart. He knew that to remember him was to become like him. What do you think about when your mind is free to think without compulsion or necessity? That is one of the most important facts about you. What do you think about during the Lord's Supper? Jesus Christ! Jesus Christ in his great love and mercy. Jesus Christ in his death and resurrection. Jesus Christ living and beside us to guide us and empower us. And as we do our faith is nourished, our hope is kindled, our strength is renewed. There is a Church in Pittsburgh with these words carved where only the preacher can see them as he comes into the pulpit, "Sirs, we would see Jesus." Every true minister tries to

heed that request, though he may often fail. You should never be able to sit through the observance of the Lord's Supper without remembering that Jesus instituted it and is remembered in it.

There is one other aspect of "remembrance" that we must consider. The term had a much richer meaning for those familiar with Hebrew thought than it does for those who know only English. Neville Clark, in his book *An Approach to the Theology of the Sacraments*, speaks clearly to the issue:

"Much discussion of this has been rendered futile at the outset by a failure to realize that what the Jew meant by the words 'memorial' and 'remembrance' and what the modern Englishman (American) means are as far apart as any two ideas can be. For us 'remembrance' means the recapturing of the 'memory' of an event, a transportation in thought back to the moment of its occurrence. There is the almost inevitable suggestion of the mental recollection of something or someone in fact absent. But for biblical thought the Greek anamnesis and the Hebrew zekher have the sense of re-calling or re-presenting before God an event in the past so that it becomes living, powerful and operative... Take: Eat. This is my body. This is the new covenant in my blood. Do this for the re-calling, the re-presenting of me" (62-63).

Brevard Childs (*Memory and Tradition in Israel*, SBT37, 1962) sees the Hebrew concept of 'memory' "as a means of actualizing the past."

"Actualization occurs when the worshipper experiences an identification with the original events. He bridges the gap of historical time and participates in the original history ... actualization is the process by which a past event is contemporized for a generation removed in time and space from the original event. When later Israel responded to the continuing imperative of her tradition through her memory, that moment in historical time likewise became an Exodus experience. Not in the sense that later Israel again crossed the Red Sea. This was an irreversible, once for-all event. Rather, Israel entered the same redemptive reality of the Exodus generation."

Edward P. Blair in a most illuminating article develops the concept of memory in both the Old and New Testaments (*Interpretation, January, 1961*):

"In the Bible, memory is rarely simply psychological recall. If one remembers in the biblical sense, the past is brought into the present with compelling power. Action in the present is conditioned by what is remembered.... The appeal to remembrance is strong in the New Testament:

"Remember Jesus Christ, risen from the dead descended from David..." (2 Tim. 2:8); "remembering the words of the Lord Jesus" (Acts 20:35); "do this in remembrance of me" (1 Cor. 11:24). "Praying in the name of Jesus, repeatedly enjoined in the New Testament, is a form of remembering Jesus. According to Hebrew thought, by making mention of the name, one keeps the soul of another alive and active in the present. The person ceases to exist when the name is forgotten. Thus to pray in the name of Jesus is to make him present

in living power. And to remember him when one eats the bread and drinks the cup is to know him as living Presence and to look forward to his coming triumph. To remember Jesus is to surrender to him, to obey him, to live in harmony with his gracious redemptive purpose, and to share in his destiny." (43, 46-47)

The point is that our modern way of thinking of "memory" almost presupposes a sense of absence, while the ancient Hebrew concept of "memory" presupposes a sense of presence. That sense of presence is not a crude, literalistic, Aristotelian concept, but a realistic spiritual presence. It is the basic sacramental sense—through the human the divine comes (Incarnation), through the material the spiritual comes. (The Lord's Supper). There is something here very much worth thinking about.

While most Christian Churches probably keep the Supper as a simple feast of memory the more profound aspects of the theme have not been unknown. Dr. William Robinson wrote:

"The English words 'in memory of' are very misleading. The Greek runs 'Do this as my anamnesis,' and 'as my anamnesis' is not properly translated, 'in memory of me.' It would be better translated, 'for my recalling,' where 'recalling' has the significance of 'bringing back' in actual presence. This was an element recaptured by our early teachers, as is seen from the following quotations from David King and Walter Scott: 'The believer receives the bread and the fruit of the vine as such, but at the same time constituted to him the body and blood of the now risen Lord, so associated that to look on them is to rebehold his Savior's death;' 'What then are Baptism and the Lord's Supper? I answer that they are the crucifixion, or death, burial and resurrection of Christ, repeating themselves in the life and profession of the disciples, and proclaiming to the ages that Christ, that was to come, is come.' Here we are in the realm of action, not of metaphysics, and in the Lord's Supper we have the real action of our Lord. It is this profound truth which finds expression in the fourth verse of G. Y. Tickle's beautiful communion hymn...

Thankful that while we view
Thy body bruised and torn,
Life, health, and healing still accrue
From stripes which thou has borne" (p. 36).
(*The Administration of the Lord's Supper*)

Our point is more than made that here in the words, "Do this in remembrance of me," more is meant than a psychological stimulant, a kind of memory-quickener.

"To come to the Lord's Supper is just like going to Jesus while he was on earth. To those who went without any intention of obedience Jesus could not reveal Himself. To those who went with a real difficulty, He gave light. To the penitent, He gave His Gospel of forgiveness. To the weak, He gave new strength and character. To the sorrowful He gave comfort" (O. B. Milligan, "The Christian Sacraments" in *Christian Faith and Practice*, Church of Scotland Committee, 106-107).

When we come to the Blessed Table we come into the Presence of Jesus as truly as did the people who came to him in Galilee. What he was able to do for them in those days, he does for us now. The bread and the wine speak to us in the First Person, "This is My Body" ... "This cup is the New Testament (new agreement) in My blood." These elements say to us with the voice of Jesus, "This means me."

Something of the profound nature of the Hebrew concept of 'memory' has significance here. Perhaps A. M. Hunter has said it as well as any:

"To remember something in Hebrew fashion is not merely to entertain a pale and static idea of it; it is to make the past event present again, for good or evil, and therefore to 'remember' Christ and his death at the Supper is to make the living Lord present again in the power of his accepted sacrifice." (*The Gospel According to Paul*, 42).

The Lord's Supper was instituted for the purpose of keeping ever before us the meaning of the death of Jesus and of bringing us into a Holy of Holies where we can come into his presence. "This do in remembrance of me. "This do for my re-calling."

As the hymn we often sing says so clearly, "Here, O my Lord, I see thee face to face." Another hymn we sing reminds us that when we come to the Table "Amidst us our Beloved stands":

If now, with eyes defiled and dim,
We see the signs, but see not him;
O may his love the scales displace,
And bid us see him face to face.
Charles H. Spurgeon

THERE IS A SECOND NAME FOR THIS FEAST.

It is referred to not only as the Lord's Supper, but as the Eucharist. Early in the history of the Church the word Eucharist was used of the Lord's Supper. When Jesus instituted the Supper he "gave thanks" (eucharistesas). That fact is recorded with the greatest simplicity, but recall the circumstances. Jesus knew his hour had come. His earthly ministry was about to close, and his work seemed hardly begun. Only a few unlearned fishermen and peasants had come to recognize in him the revelation of the Father. Could he rely on them? Alone he must go forth to face the malice and hatred of those who falsely accused him. Yet, "He gave thanks." The courage of it! The faith of it! Beyond the dark shadows and in the presence of death Jesus saw that which enabled him to give thanks. The celebration of the Supper has always been the great act of the Church's thanksgiving. Adoration is the keynote of the whole service. Eucharist reminds us that we are attending not a funeral but a feast. And we need reminding, for sometimes the keeping of the Supper would remind you more of those who come together to mourn a defeat rather than those who come together to celebrate a victory. We meet, not on Friday, the day Christ died, but on Sunday, the day he arose from the grave. However solemn the service may be, it can never be sad. Here we give grateful praise in hymn and prayer for all that Christ has brought us—peace with God, the forgiveness of sin, and power to break free from

our sins. Little wonder that the Eucharistic prayers in the Didache are almost entirely prayers of thanksgiving. There is first the prayer concerning the cup:

"We give thanks to thee, our Father, for the Holy Vine of David, thy child, which thou didst make known to us through Jesus thy child; to thee be glory forever.

There is the prayer for the bread:

"We give thee thanks, our Father, for the life and knowledge which thou didst make known to us through Jesus thy child; to thee be glory forever.

Seneca, the Roman philosopher once wrote: "All my life I have been seeking to climb out of the pit of my besetting sins. And I can not do it: and I never will, unless a hand is let down to draw me up." That hand, thank God, has been let down. Power is available to live victoriously. No one need live a beaten life. Christ conquers besetting sin, reclaims us to character and to power, remembers us when we forget him, believes in us when we lose faith in ourselves, gives us encouragement to try again and again and again.

There is a touching example of this in a story from St. George's West Church in Edinburgh more than fifty years ago. One of the assisting ministers that day was Dr. John Duncan, Professor of Hebrew at the University, whom the students had nicknamed "Rabbi" because he very much looked the part. He noticed that a woman sitting near the front passed the cup without drinking the wine, and when he saw her eyes dampen with tears, he walked to the pew and took the cup. As he handed it back to her he said, "Take it, lassie; it's for sinners." And as the meaning of that truth sinks in, you can understand why the Lord's Supper is called the Eucharist.

The Eucharist is the time for praise and thanksgiving to God for his gifts in creation and redemption. We ought to sing more often Johann Crüger's great hymn:

"Deck thyself, my soul, with gladness,
Leave the gloomy haunts of sadness,
Come into the day light's splendor,
There with joy thy praises render
Unto Him whose grace unbounded
Hath this wondrous banquet founded;
High o'er all the heavens He reigneth,
Yet to dwell with thee He deigneth."

A THIRD NAME BY WHICH THIS FEAST IS KNOWN IS COMMUNION.

As Paul wrote to the Corinthians, "The cup of blessing which we bless, is it not the communion ('sharing' NEB; 'participation' RSV) of the blood of Christ? The bread which we break, is it not the communion of the body of Christ? (1 Cor. 10:16 KJV). The Greek word is koinonia.

Something of this thought is expressed in that beautiful hymn we sing so often at the Communion service:

Amidst us our beloved stands,
And bids us view His pierced hands;
Points to the wounded feet and side,
Blest emblems of the crucified.

If now, with eyes defiled and dim,
We see the signs, but see not Him;
O, may His love the scales displace,
And bid us see Him face to face.

We differ, of course, as to how this Presence is to be expressed. Roman Catholics teach a doctrine of transubstantiation, meaning that the bread and wine are changed into the actual body and blood of Christ. Others believe there is a "real presence" in the Communion, but that the presence is spiritual, which means it can be known in those parts of our being which are spirit. Our minds are spirit, and when we find ourselves thinking his thoughts after him, he is here. Our hearts are spirit, and when we find our feelings cleansed and ourselves loving as he loved, he is here. Our wills are spirit, and when our aims parallel his purpose, he is here.

When I went off to college to prepare for the Christian ministry I roomed for a few weeks with a tall young man from Virginia, J. Daniel Joyce. He went on to receive his doctorate from Yale University and later was to become Dean of the Graduate School at Phillips University, Enid, Oklahoma. Dr. Joyce wrote an article for the *Christian Evangelist* (September 29, 1958) in which he addresses himself to the presence of God in the Communion service. Listen to his words:

"When men seek to analyze their experiences and to define that in worship which 'gives a lift' to their spirit, we don't need to be vague. We have the answer.

That 'certain something' is not the atmosphere of worship, nor the beautiful accouterments of worship, nor the appropriate appointments of the sanctuary, nor the way the music is rendered, nor the way the lights are lowered. All this misses the point entirely. Jesus said: 'For where two or three are gathered in my name, there am I in the midst of them.' That indescribable presence is the Lord himself. It is his Spirit witnessing with our spirit that we are the children of God.

All such vague and shallow sentiments as 'I believe that someone in the great somewhere will hear my prayer' are a travesty and an insult....'There am I in the midst of them.' If men really believed this the churches would be crowded, would they not?"

(Christian Evangelist, Sept. 29, 1958).

If you would like to have something of that experience, close your eyes and think of Jesus as standing beside you. See the look of calm confidence in his face. Feel the touch of his hand upon your shoulder. Note the warm friendliness in his voice as he speaks and says, "Be still and know that I am God. Come unto me and I will give you rest. They that wait upon the Lord shall renew their strength. My grace is sufficient for you." And when the service is over and you go

home and some member of the family who could not be present asks, "Who was at church today?" then you can answer, "Jesus was there; I know because he spoke to me his word of peace and of pardon and of power." When that happens, this Supper will be a real Communion.

When we speak of Communion, we think not of the past but of the present; not of One who is gone from us, but of One who is present with us; not of One whom we remember, but of One with whom we have present actual fellowship. "Memory is absence felt: Communion is presence realized." The Lord's Supper, as Communion, says to us—as the Lord Jesus was physically present with his disciples in the Upper Room, so here and now we can enter into fellowship with his Spiritual Presence. This is where in a special sense he has promised to be with us. It is by his own appointment that we meet him at his Table. Because he knows how difficult it is for us to grasp the unseen, he uses the seen and the material to make his presence real to us. That is the way God works—through the material the spiritual comes. The Incarnation says to us—through the human the divine comes.

If the act of Communion means that it is the receiving of the Lord Jesus Christ into our lives which brings nourishment to us, and causes us to grow in likeness to him, then we must believe in his Real Presence with us at the Table. It is the Lord himself who presides at the Communion Service. It is the Lord himself who says to us as we receive the elements, "This is My Body," "This cup is the New Covenant in My Blood." Remember that these are his own words, and they mean nothing unless they mean that through the bread and wine we receive to the believing heart his Real Presence. And as we receive that Presence we find that he is able to do for us all that his disciples found he could do for them. We receive him "with all his benefits." He brings forgiveness to us, and he renews us; he teaches us what his will is for us; and he makes us strong to do it; he brings us back to our Father's house.

Perhaps this note from Donald M. Ballie will help us see how the Real Presence is manifest to us: "Present to the faith of the receiver—that is the most real presence conceivable for a divine reality in this present world. The most objective and penetrating kind of presence that God can give us is through faith.... Paul's prayer for his friends at Ephesus is 'that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith' (Eph. 3:17). That is how Christ dwells in our hearts in this present world" (*The Theology of the Sacraments, 101*). I believe Christ meets us in the Supper in a real Communion—a real participation—a real fellowship—a real spiritual presence.

S. S. Lappin was a member of the famous Lappin family from Geff, Illinois. "Geff had, and still has, three streets each way—north and south, east and west. Fifty years ago (written in 1958) there were forty-four houses, three stores, two churches, a flour mill, a school house and a post office." In his colorfully written book, *Where The Long Trail Begins*, S. S. Lappin tells this moving story:

"Three times I was the youngest of our family, for, though two baby brothers came to our cabin home, they left us after a playfully prattled welcome and farewell. One of them looks at me out of the picture I recall now. I have a clear remembrance of seeing him but twice, once when I got down to give him my place in my mother's arms and again when she bade him good-bye and took me to her again, and I pitied him both times. At the first he seemed so weak and helpless, and at the last so quiet and so cold. But what I remember

best is that once, in the autumn—his first and last autumn—when learning to walk, he pressed a baby hand into the soft clay with which the cracks of our house had been newly filled. When Spring came again he had gone from us, but all through that summer and till autumn came again, there was a little hand print in the hardened clay....My mother's vision was very defective, and sometimes that summer when we were alone at the house I saw her go to that print in the clay and run her sensitive finger tips along its outline."

The picture of that blind mother tracing the finger prints of her darling boy in the hardened clay is a dramatic and touching picture of fellowship, participation, communion. For a few fleeting moments he was with her again. The touch of love is surely more than mere memory.

One does not commune with a symbol; one communes with a Person. We believe in a Real Presence because we believe in a living Christ who has risen from the dead and who, though we cannot see him, encounters us spiritually as we participate in the means of grace which he has provided. Thus, the feast becomes for us a source of nourishment and spiritual energy that strengthens our sense of fellowship with Christ and sustains us for the Christian journey. The touch of love makes Jesus Christ real to us in fellowship, participation, communion.

FINALLY, THIS FEAST IS CALLED BY SOME A SACRAMENT.

While sacrament is not a biblical word it may suggest a truth which can add meaning to the observance of the Lord's Supper. It comes from the Latin and is a transliteration of the word *sacramentum*. The "sacramentum" was the oath the Roman soldier took that he would be loyal to the Emperor, and serve the Empire with his life. As King Arthur said of his knights: "I made them lay their hands in mine and swear to reverence the King." When we keep the Supper we pledge ourselves to be good soldiers of Jesus Christ, and we receive from him the assurance that he will not only be with us as a guide to lead us, but will himself enter into us so that we are enabled to gain the victory which overcomes the world.

So it is today. When you make the good confession—"I believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of the living God" and are baptized into the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit" for the remission of your sins (Acts 2:38), you are taking an oath of allegiance to Jesus Christ as Lord. You commit yourself to the person of Jesus and promise to be a faithful member of his Church (1 Cor. 12:13). When you gather in worship and partake of the Lord's Supper you renew that oath of allegiance—you rededicate your life to Christ.

The Roman soldier committed himself to the Emperor and the Empire even to the laying down of his life. Perhaps we can understand Dietrich Bonhoeffer when he said, "When Jesus calls a man he bids him come and die." That is the kind of pledge we give at the Communion Table. From the beginning when Christians have received the bread and drank from the cup they have made vows to amend and improve their ways, to live by the word and example of Christ, to put God before mammon, service before self, and love before hate.

Often we make pledges which are sacramental in nature, that is, we employ material things which carry spiritual significance. Two men make a gentlemen's agreement, so they shake hands, a sacrament, to seal their agreement. Two young people declare their mutual love, so they

kiss—a sacrament. They come to be married and they exchange wedding rings—another sacrament. The most sacramental of all gestures is a signature. Write your name on a check, and it means you will honor that check; sign a contract, and you bind yourself to its terms. Whenever you "take communion", as we say, you are renewing your agreement (your oath of allegiance) with Christ. You are saluting the flag of the Kingdom of God and renewing your pledge to be a good soldier. When you eat the bread and drink the cup, you are giving your word of honor once again that you will keep your promises.

So, commemoration, thanksgiving, communion, commitment: these are the meanings that we glean from the names given to the feast at the Lord's Table.

If today you are ashamed because you have not been as faithful to Christ as you would have been—come to the Table—renew your covenant and go forth to try again.

If you are discouraged by the load of life and weary in the midst of the years—come to the Table—meet your Master face to face and go forth renewed and strengthened to face whatever tomorrow may bring. This is the place of new resolutions. This is the place to grow as a Christian. This is the place to determine to be more grateful for the sacrifice Christ made for us all. At his Table Christ binds himself to us, pledges himself to be our Lord and Savior; and there we, by partaking of the bread and cup, bind ourselves to Him, placing ourselves under the bonds of the covenant, as loyal soldiers of Jesus Christ we renew our vows to serve and obey him all our days. Before the glory of his cross the divine grace melts and moves the human heart. Isaac Watts voices our response:

See, from his head, his hands, his feet,
Sorrow and love flow mingled down:
Did e'er such love and sorrow meet,
Or thorns compose so rich a crown?

Were the whole realm of nature mine,
That were a present far too small;
Love so amazing, so divine,
Demand my soul, my life, my all.