

Easter Greetings!

A number of folks have become curious in recent months about what Martin Luther had to say on the topic of Holy Communion, and specifically on the frequency and importance of it. Passion Sunday, Holy Week, Easter Sunday and the entire 50 days of the Easter season seem to be the most appropriate time to write about the Sacrament of the Altar, because each time it is celebrated it transports us again into Christ's Passion on the cross, his blood shed (not spilled) for us, and the glorious words echoing out from an empty tomb, "He is alive!"

In the conclusion to The Large Catechism (Chapter XV), Luther says quite a lot about the Lord's Supper. I have outlined a few of his main points along with his own words quoted below. May God use them to deepen our understanding and appreciation for this Great Mystery that we can never fully understand or appreciate.

Easter Blessings,
Pastor Chris

Point 1 – It should be frequent:

In conclusion, since we have now the true understanding and doctrine of the Sacrament, there is indeed need of some admonition and exhortation, that men may not let so great a treasure which is daily administered and distributed among Christians pass by unheeded, that is, that those who would be Christians make ready to receive this

venerable Sacrament often. For we see that men seem weary and lazy with respect to it...

Point 2 – No one should be forced to commune (unfortunately, that has happened in our own history):

Now, it is true, as we have said, that no one should by any means be coerced or compelled, lest we institute a new murdering of souls.

Point 3 – It defines us as Christians (Luther uses firm and direct language here):

Nevertheless, it must be known that such people as deprive themselves of, and withdraw from, the Sacrament so long a time are not to be considered Christians. For Christ has not instituted it to be treated as a show, but has commanded His Christians to eat and drink it, and thereby remember Him.

And, indeed, those who are true Christians and esteem the Sacrament precious and holy will urge and impel themselves unto it.

Point 4 – It frustrates the plans of the devil:

For as in other matters pertaining to faith, love, and patience, it is not enough to teach and instruct only, but there is need also of daily exhortation, so here also there is need of

continuing to preach that men may not become weary and disgusted, since we know and feel how the devil always opposes this and every Christian exercise, and drives and deters therefrom as much as he can.

Point 5 – Christ commands us, and it is a mark of our obedience:

And we have, in the first place, the clear text in the very words of Christ: Do this in remembrance of Me. These are bidding and commanding words by which all who would be Christians are enjoined to partake of this Sacrament.

...Yea, just because He speaks the words, As oft as ye do it, it is nevertheless implied that we should do it often; and it is added for the reason that He wishes to have the Sacrament free, not limited to special times, like the Passover of the Jews, which they were obliged to eat only once a year, and that just upon the fourteenth day of the first full moon in the evening, and which they must not vary a day. As if He would say by these words: I institute a Passover or Supper for you which you shall enjoy not only once a year, just upon this evening, but often, when and where you will, according to every one's opportunity and necessity, bound to no place or appointed time;

although the Pope afterwards perverted it, and again made a Jewish feast of it.

...But we neither force nor compel any one; nor need any one do it to serve or please us. But this should induce and constrain you by itself, that He desires it and that it is pleasing to Him. You must not suffer men to coerce you unto faith or any good work. We are doing no more than to say and exhort you as to what you ought to do, not for our sake, but for your own sake. He invites and allures you; if you despise it, you must answer for it yourself.

Point 6 – It gives us strength and faith, and it makes us worthy through the blood of Christ Jesus:

If therefore, you are heavy-laden and feel your weakness, then go joyfully to this Sacrament and obtain refreshment, consolation, and strength. For if you would wait until you are rid of such burdens, that you might come to the Sacrament pure and worthy, you must forever stay away.