



### **Prayer Before Studying Theology:**

O Thou, who didst manifest thyself in the breaking of bread to thy disciples at Emmaus: Grant us ever through the same blessed sacrament of thy presence to know thee, and to love thee more and more with all our hearts. Abide with us, O Lord, that we may ever abide in thee; for thy tender mercy's sake. Amen.

--E.B. Pusey

### **Week #5b**

- **Luther on the Lord's Supper and Its Function Within the Believer's Life**

Before we can examine Luther's view of the Lord's Supper and its significance within the Christian life, we need to examine the views held by Aquinas and late medieval writers, against which Luther is reacting in formulating his own views.

(Handout of Hist. II Week #14b: Thomas Aquinas and Eucharistic Devotion)

Aquinas on the Real Presence: "This is my body" = at the consecration, the elements of bread and wine actually become the body and blood of Christ (the real presence, by which Christ offers himself to the Church through the Lord's Supper).

In this event, the bread and wine cease to be what they were (bread and wine) and become the body and blood of Christ. As such, the substance of the elements (i.e. what the elements fundamentally and really are) has changed; the substance of the bread and wine has been wholly converted into the body and blood of Christ, so that nothing of the former remains (=transubstantiation).

This change of substance is a reality discernable only by faith, not by outward sense. In the Lord's Supper one is therefore invited to grasp by faith the reality that the bread and wine have been wholly converted into Christ's body and blood, setting aside the misleading external appearance (of bread and wine) that remains (=the visible species that is discerned by the external senses).

#### Aquinas on the Lord's Supper (Mass) as a Sacrifice

Why must the one substance replace the other at consecration? Why can't the divine presence and the created substance simply coexist with one another, just as they did in Christ's Incarnation (one person with two natures). There are several reasons why Aquinas rejects this.

One of the reasons has to do with the fact that the Mass (Lord's Supper) is a representation or re-enactment of Christ's sacrifice and the concept of "sacrifice" is essential to understanding what happens at the moment of consecration. It is important to note that sacrifice requires the destruction or physical modification of what is offered

(animals are killed, bread is broken), making it something different than what it previously was and useless for its previous purposes.

### Devotional Significance of the Doctrine

- Because God understands our bodily nature and its limitations, he presents himself and all his grace to us through the person of Jesus (the incarnate Lord) in concrete, tangible ways that can be grasped by the bodily senses. By this means he aims to draw us into communion with himself so that we might share directly in the benefits of his Incarnation, crucifixion and resurrection.
- The sign perceived by the bodily senses is a sign of an invisible grace not observable by the bodily senses. (The appropriateness of the sign lies in its aptness to signify, e.g. the washing with water aptly shows the cleansing from sin which occurs) By God's power and institution, the sign is able to convey the grace that it signifies, affecting and bringing about change in the person who receives it in faith, healing the soul and producing a greater and more selfless love (charity) for God and one's neighbor which leads one toward eternal life as a child of God.

(eucharistic adoration)

(reception under a single kind, i.e. of the bread only, by the laity)

(doctrine of concomitance=the substance of the body of Christ includes Christ's whole human and divine nature [body, blood, soul and divinity], all of which are in and throughout the consecrated elements)

By Luther's time, because of the dislike of auricular confession (i.e. audibly confessing one's sins to a priest in the rite of penance), reception of the Lord's Supper had become increasingly infrequent. (The Fourth Lateran Council of 1215-1216 had required that one commune at least once per year, with confession preceding it.)

Luther was also not sympathetic to the ideas of transubstantiation or of the Mass as a sacrifice and a good work; it is rather the testament Christ gives (the forgiveness of sins is promised) by means of the words of institution.

- The sacrament thus rests upon Christ and the Word that he speaks and not upon the priest's words (which would make the sacrament too much like an offering to God rather than a receiving from God) or the individual's faith (too subjective and individualistic).
- Luther on analogy to body and soul and to Incarnation (cf. Luther's later definition of ubiquity in terms of repletive presence, i.e. the supernatural presence of God which can be conceived as filling and being present in all space, while being confined by no space).

Luther was dissatisfied with the idea that persons should receive the Lord's Supper only insofar as they were commanded to do so and he also disliked the idea that persons who recognized their sinfulness and unworthiness should feel themselves disqualified from receiving the Lord's Supper, since it was precisely at such a time that the repentance and consolation associated with the Lord's Supper were most appropriate and most needed.

- The Lord's Supper was instituted precisely so that sinners might trust and believe and be strengthened, knowing that Christ is able to heal them.
- It is precisely when one recognizes that he or she is "weak in faith, cold in love, and faint in hope" and wishes that matters were otherwise that one should come to receive the Lord's Supper.
- And if one has a greater desire for God and Christ, then it is all the more appropriate that one should come to the Lord's Supper.

The unrepentant of course ought not to receive the LS. Neither should those who come outwardly but lack the inward desire to receive what God offers.

The greatest thing to be avoided, however, is to receive the LS while trusting in one's own righteousness. When we hear the words, "Take, eat, this is my body, which is given for *you*. Take, drink all of you; for it is the cup of the new and eternal testament in my blood, poured out for *you* and for all *for the forgiveness of sins*,"

"[w]e should take all of these words to hear, placing our trust in them and not doubting that with these the Lord invites us to be his guests at this abundant meal... With these words you must now edify your hungry heart and rely upon the truth of this divine promise, then receive the sacrament, make your way to God and say, 'Lord, it is true that I am not worthy for you to come under my roof, but I need and desire your help and grace to make me godly. I now come to you, trusting only in the wonderful words I just heard, with which you invite me to your table and promise me, the unworthy one, forgiveness of all my sins through your body and blood if I eat and drink them in this sacrament. Amen, Dear Lord, I do not doubt the truth of your words. Trusting them, I eat and drink with you. Do unto me according to your words. Amen.'"

"Worthy reception" therefore has to do not with our own diligence and effort in putting forth acceptable works so that we are pure enough and worthy enough, but rather with whether we believe the truth of the divine words (set forth in the words instituting the Lord's Supper) and therefore are able to look to God for the forgiveness of our sins and a spiritual strength that is greater than sin, death and hell. "The only question is whether you thoroughly recognize and feel you labor and your burden and that you yourself fervently desire to be relieved of these."

- A fear that we are not pure enough and worthy enough, far from promoting reform and advance, actually saps our strength because it is a form of unbelief that looks to a righteousness we can achieve apart from Christ and prior to Christ and places its hope in that.
- We are not to look to ourselves (rather than looking to Christ alone in faith in accordance with the word of promise which is connected to that sign by Christ's commandment): "If you do not want to come to the sacrament until you are perfectly clean and whole, it would be better for you to remain away entirely. The sacrament is to purify you and help you. Yet you do not want to come until you no longer need its help and have already helped yourself." "[D]on't you want the forgiveness of sins?"

- This is why attempts to make people better by commandments and laws always fail—they always look to the wrong source and lead people away from divine grace into spiritual decline.

In equally bad shape are the people (Anabaptists and spiritualists) who cannot believe in the real presence, asking “How can this be?”

- We are not asked to explain how this can be, only to have faith in Christ’s words that this is so and that he is present in the sign: “This is my body,” to which faith assents, despite all appearances to the contrary.
- God is indeed present in the sacrament in and through His Word.
  - “For as soon as Christ says: ‘This is my body,’ his body is present through the Word and the power of the Holy Spirit.” Christ “has put himself into the Word, and through the Word he puts himself into the bread also.”
  - The person who can only see bread there has no faith in the words of promise, by which Christ instituted the Supper. “You must depend on the Word and consider it more than bread.”

If a faithless person were to receive the sacrament, still Christ (his body and blood) would be present as he promised, though to judge unbelief, rather than to impart himself and his life to the faithful persons who have gathered to receive it (his blood is shed *for you*; your sins are forgiven; the Word to which the bread and wine are annexed confirms this, for it both prepares the heart effects what it says, eliciting faith and bringing about the forgiveness of sins).

The sacrament and confession have this in common, one can hear the promise that the forgiveness of sins is “for you.”