

Dear brothers and sisters in Christ,

Greetings from the parsonage! Snow is on the ground, but not in the streets—just the way I like it! The temperature's not half bad either. Today, anyway. Growing up in Illinois like most of you, I know that the weather can change at the drop of a hat. Winter may have only just begun, or this may be all the snow we get. We'll just have to wait and see.



While we have to wait to see what the weather will do, we don't have to wait to continue our study of the Sacrament of the Altar. Martin Luther continues to write on the subject "(h)ere is Christ's word: 'Take, eat, this is my body.' 'Drink of this, all of you, this is the New Testament in my blood,' etc. Here we shall take our stand and see who dares to instruct Christ and alter what he has spoken (BoC, p.468)." For Luther, and for each of us, Jesus' words should be enough to convince us of what the Sacrament is, namely, His body and blood given for the forgiveness of our sins, and the strengthening of our faith. Because it is Christ's words that are spoken over the bread and wine, the bread and wine are in, with, and under His body and blood.

No matter whether it is a corrupt pastor or a person partaking of the Sacrament unworthily or without belief, the Sacrament is Jesus' own body and blood. The Sacrament does not rely on the faith of

either the administering pastor or the participant; it relies on God's Word, and where God's Word is spoken over the elements, there we have the Sacrament. "For upon these words (of our Lord spoken at the Sacrament) rest our whole argument, our protection and defense against all errors and deceptions that have ever arisen or may yet arise (BoC, p.468)."

But, while it is dangerous for a corrupt pastor or an unbeliever to partake of the Sacrament, do not be misled, my dear fellow redeemed in Christ! The Sacrament of the Altar is "appropriately called food of the soul, for it nourishes and strengthens the new creature. For in the first instance, we are born anew through baptism. However, our human flesh and blood...have not lost their old skin (BoC, p.469)." That is, we are not cleansed of all the sin in us yet. We are totally and one hundred percent forgiven in Christ, and are God's dear redeemed children. But we still have the stain of sin on ourselves that we cannot wash off. That is why we continually go to the Sacrament: to receive forgiveness and the strengthening of our faith.

In other words, if you feel you are weak in the faith, you should not refrain as though you were someone who did not believe. Rather, you should GO! Go and receive the forgiveness of your sins. And Go and receive strength for your faith—for the Sacrament gives both. Again, so long as we are in this world and until Jesus comes again, we will have the stain of sin on us, and we will always have a need to be forgiven and strengthened in our faith.

Although Advent may be over, we continue to watch for our Lord Jesus Christ to come again, this time in glory. Until He returns, though, I pray that you hear again His words: "'Take, eat, this is my body,' 'Drink of this, all of you, this is the New Testament in my blood (BoC, p.468).'" Hear those words, and come, my dear brothers and sisters in Christ, that you may have the strength you need.

Your brother and under-Shepherd in Christ,

Pastor Josh