

Grace and peace are yours through Jesus, who gives you his body and blood. Amen.

Our Lord Jesus Christ, on the night he was betrayed, took a towel, wrapped it around his waist, poured water into a basin and washed his disciples' feet (John 13:4-5). Remember now, Jesus is God in the flesh (John 1:1). He made the universe with a Word (John 1:3). All the fullness of the deity dwells within him (Colossians 2:9), and he is washing feet.

Why does he do it? To teach you how to love. To leave you an example to follow. It's unbelievable, God serving man like this. But that's the point. Jesus says, "A new command I give you: Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another" (John 13:34).

Love those around you with the same love that Jesus has for you. Serve them selflessly, even if it means washing their feet. Because Jesus' love doesn't stop; it doesn't run out of gas. It runs straight through death itself. Yours should too.

So ... are you willing to die for the people sitting next to you? Harder still, are you willing to live for them? If you're anything like the disciples Jesus first spoke the new command to, no, you're not.

He speaks this **on the night he was betrayed (11:23)**. When Judas trades his life for thirty pieces of silver; when Peter refuses to admit that he even knows Jesus, and the other ten abandon him. They don't love Jesus, let alone one another.

And why do they do it? What do they get for it? Judas gets money. Peter avoids the ugliness of being associated with Jesus. The ten save their skin. On the first Holy Thursday Jesus surrounds himself with selfish sinners. He does the same thing tonight.

When you betray Jesus, what do you get? You get instant gratification – for your temper, for your lust. I get the satisfaction of showing that I know what's best, not some dusty, old Bible. We get the relief of not being associated with Jesus and all the ugliness that comes with it.

But let's be honest. Most of the time you don't really get anything for betraying Jesus. You sin because you're only thinking of one thing: you. Jesus never enters your mind. Sin means that you love something more than Jesus: yourself. How is that any different than Judas or Peter or the rest? It's not.

And yet on this night of gathered, selfish sinners, someone else also loves you more than Jesus: Jesus himself. And he shows it not with a footwashing or a new command, but with a meal.

Jesus does all this at the Passover Festival (John 13:1). And the Passover meal quite literally forces you to **watch what you eat**, because every item on the menu is thick with symbolic goodness (Exodus 12:7-8). It is all about Israel's exodus from Egypt.

The garnish is bitter herbs, because they were slaves in Egypt, and slavery is a bitter way of life. The bread is yeastless, because they left Egypt so quickly, they didn't have time to waste on rising dough. And they roast a lamb, because their ancestors painted the doorframes with lamb's blood and death passed over them.

With this meal they remember how the blood of a lamb rescued from death. Sound familiar? The Passover is a picture of what Jesus does tomorrow to rescue us. This means that the symbolic Passover meal has fulfilled its purpose. So tonight, Jesus replaces it with a new meal, a new meal that empowers you to live his new command.

He starts with a loaf of bread, breaks it into pieces and gives it to his disciples to eat. Then he takes a cup of wine, passes it around, and everyone takes a drink **(11:24-25)**.

What's he doing? Well, let's start with what he's not doing. He is *not* instituting another meal of symbols. Because compared to that Passover lamb, bread and wine fail miserably as pictures of Jesus' sacrifice. In fact, bread and wine do nothing to make you think about Jesus' sacrifice for your sins.

And that's great, because Jesus is not giving us a meal that symbolizes what he will do. Instead, as he passes around that bread he says, **"This is my body, which is for you" (11:24)**. And as he passes around the wine he says, **"This cup is the new covenant in my blood" (11:25)**.

Jesus' words are crystal clear. In the Lord's Supper, the bread that we eat is not just bread; it is also Jesus' body. That wine that we drink is not just wine; it's also Jesus' blood. He doesn't say that the bread symbolizes his body. He doesn't say that the wine represents his blood.

So **watch what you eat**, because there is more going on here than what you can see: **For whenever you eat this bread and drink this cup, you proclaim the Lord's death until he comes (11:26)**.

Because ... which body does he give? The body that died and rose? You'd better believe it. That's the only body he has. What blood does he give? The blood that poured from his wounds as he died? Of course. He has no other blood.

It's unbelievable, God serving man like this. But that's the point. Jesus promises that bread and wine are the vehicles that deliver his body and blood to us (1 Corinthians 10:16). How? Beats me. But Jesus says it – he who is God in the flesh, who made the universe with a Word, in whom all the fullness of the deity dwells – he says it, so that settles it. "What Christ's lips say and speak, so it is. He can never lie or deceive" (Large Catechism V:14).

So **watch what you eat**, because if you do not believe Jesus' clear words about this meal, it will do you as much good as eating shards of broken glass. **So then, whoever eats the bread or drinks the cup of the Lord in an unworthy manner will be guilty of sinning against the body and blood of the Lord (11:27).** What does that mean?

Well, tonight Jesus takes a meal that is only a symbol and replaces it with a meal that delivers himself. What a shame, if you flip it back and view the bread and the wine as symbols of Jesus' body and blood. Then you receive it in an unworthy manner (1 Corinthians 11:29).

This is a special meal that requires special preparation. **Everyone ought to examine themselves before they eat of the bread and drink from the cup (11:28).** Examine yourself. Ask, "Do I believe that I receive Jesus' body and blood? Do I love others like Jesus loves me? Do I love my wife that way? Do I love my teachers that way, my boss, my kids? Or am I all about me?"

And any time you honestly examine yourself, you will hate what you find. A betrayer, like Judas. A denier, like Peter. Selfish and sinful to the core (Genesis 8:21).

Thank God. You're just the sort of person this meal is for. You receive it in a worthy manner when you recognize your sin. The Lord's Supper is for sinners only. What was it we just sang? "Do not come if you suppose you need not him who died and rose" (CW 659:4).

All of this shows that we very carefully need to **watch what we eat**. Holy Communion is powerful medicine against sin, but like any medicine, you need to follow the instructions, or it will hurt instead of help. And oh man, how it helps!

Tomorrow Jesus gives his body and sheds his blood for the sin of the world. So in the Supper, when Jesus gives you his body and blood, he is giving you his sacrifice – in a personal and individual way. The *only thing* that opens the door to heaven and Jesus just gives it to you in this meal. **Watch what you eat!** This is the priceless payment Jesus made for your sins!

There is not a single person on the planet who can explain it, but that's the point. Jesus gives you something that is beyond you so that you can receive what is beyond you – the certainty that everything you have ever done wrong in your life will not be held against you when you die.

That is the essence of the **new covenant (11:25)**. A covenant is an agreement between two parties. The old covenant was a two-sided contract. Under the old covenant, God's blessings were tied to the people's obedience (Jeremiah 11:3-5), which meant that God's blessings were always in doubt, because the people were always sinning.

But tonight Jesus establishes the new covenant. In the new covenant, God simply declares what he is going to do without placing any obligation on you (Jeremiah 31:32-34), so his blessings are never in doubt, since they depend on you in no way.

Moreover, this new covenant is also Jesus' last will and testament, put into effect when he dies (Hebrews 9:15-17), signed in his blood. Literally. And the one thing Jesus wanted to leave you when he died? Himself. His body. His blood.

Not to think about. Not to ponder. To eat. To drink. God made you to receive information with five senses, and in the Lord's Supper you experience forgiveness through all five senses.

You hear Jesus' promise: "for you for the forgiveness of your sins" (1 Corinthians 11:24; Matthew 26:28). You smell Jesus' Supper. You see the price he paid for your salvation. You touch Jesus' grace. And, finally, you quite literally "taste and see that the LORD is good" (Psalm 34:8).

It's unbelievable, God serving man like this. But that's the point. You heard the First Reading. The blood of the old covenant allowed a select few from Israel to draw near to God and see his feet (Exodus 24:1-11). But in the blood of the new covenant, God draws near to us and we see his face in Christ (2 Corinthians 4:6).

So **watch what you eat**, and treat this meal like the treasure that it is. There is no other meal that takes you to the cross, shows you the Savior hanging there, bleeding for your sins, and says, **"For you" (11:24)**. That is love. Not that we love Jesus or serve him or wash his feet, but that he loves us and gives his life as a sacrifice for our sins (1 John 4:10). Take and eat. Take and drink. Happy Lent. Amen.